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**Orphans: Childhood Alienation and the Idea of the Self in
Rousseau, Wordsworth and Mary Shelley**

By

Jonathan Jones

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Declaration

This thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted for a degree at another university. No section of this thesis has been published or used as part of any other academic assignment.

Abstract

This thesis explores representations of the self in Rousseau's *Émile* (1762), Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1805) and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). It uses the idea of 'the orphan' not in a strictly literal sense, but in order to explore representations of the self that stress an individual's autonomy, and thus tend to minimise the importance of society and cultural inheritance to the formation of the self. Crucial to understanding this model of the self is the idea found in *Émile* of autonomous natural growth: the idea that a child brought up in relative seclusion in the countryside, and offered the minimum of assistance from its adult carers, is capable of developing naturally, seemingly under its own volition. Rousseau believed that such a child would have an authenticity lacking in those children unduly contaminated by external cultural factors. The model of autonomous growth proposed by Rousseau relates to the discourse of possessive individualism and to the idea of the self-made man, beholden to no one, and free to make his own way in the world. This model of the self influenced Wordsworth and Mary Shelley, who both respond to and react against Rousseau's thinking.

The thesis explores the contradictions implicit in this model of self-formation. It stresses the impossibility of keeping children free from external human factors, looking at the way that physical and mental development is necessarily accompanied by a child's acculturation, for example in relation to language acquisition. It explores the complications that arise from this in relation to questions of autonomy. The thesis highlights the sense of alienation and the emotional cost experienced by the child who is brought up to perceive itself as set apart from 'others', as exemplified by the loneliness felt by the most isolated of the 'children' under discussion, Victor Frankenstein's creation. In contrast to the discourse of possessive individualism this study persists in treating the self as historically situated, and inhabited by the culture that surrounds it.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations have been used:

Émile

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile* [1762], trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Everyman 2002)

Second Discourse

A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality in The Social Contract and Discourses [1755], trans. G.D.H Cole (London: Everyman 1993)

The Prelude

All references are to the 1805 poem and are taken from, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850: Authoritative Texts Context and Reception Recent Critical Essays*, eds. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and Stephen Gill (London: Norton 1979)

Frankenstein

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: 1818 Text*, ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993)

Essay

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1689], ed. Peter N Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1979)

Introduction

All three of the writers discussed in this thesis experienced the loss of one or both of their parents in childhood. Mary Shelley and Jean-Jacques Rousseau lost their mothers in childbirth, whereas Wordsworth lost his mother when he was seven years old and his father in early adolescence. The impact of these losses clearly influenced these writers and attention is paid to this fact, but it needs to be made clear from the outset that this is not a thesis about literal orphans, but rather about the idea of ‘orphanhood’ as a way of understanding a concept of the self that emerges around the middle of the eighteenth century. This concept of the self employs a model of autonomous individuality. The individual is in *possession* of a self that is distinct from society and culture, and thus the path he chooses to take in life is not determined by social factors but by his own free will, or so the logic goes. I say ‘he’ because the selves under discussion, whether it be Rousseau’s Émile, the young William Wordsworth of *The Prelude* or Victor Frankenstein and his creation in *Frankenstein*, are male.¹ So this is also a study

¹ I have decided to treat Victor Frankenstein’s creation as ‘male’ in order to focus on the ways that he absorbs and comes to reiterate the masculinist ideologies of men like Felix De Lacey and Victor Frankenstein not from a subordinate position but in an attempt to achieve self mastery (See Chapters Six and Seven). However, many critics, particularly those approaching *Frankenstein* from a feminist perspective, have made insightful readings of the novel that identify the Creature as ‘female’ or as displaying female attributes. See Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780- 1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), pp. 203-212. Margaret Homans, *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-century Women’s Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986), pp.100-119. Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1984), pp.114-142. U.C. Knoepfelmacher, ‘Thoughts on the Aggression of Daughters’ in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley’s Novel*, eds George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press 1982), pp. 88-119. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, Yale University Press 1979), pp. 213-247.

of a version of masculinity, and the price that is paid by male middle-class children in order that they might grow up to be ‘self-made’ men.

Rousseau’s *Émile* will be the main text under discussion in Chapters One and Two, but it is also discussed throughout the thesis, as it provides a useful theoretical co-ordinate for understanding the types of subjectivity under discussion, as both Wordsworth and Mary Shelley respond to and react against Rousseau’s writing. However, it is important to make clear that the model of the self presented in *Émile*, in which the education of Rousseau’s pupil involves the minimum of contact with the social world beyond his tutor, contrasts with his conception of the citizen, most famously expressed in *The Social Contract*, in which the self is subsumed by the demands of the state. In this context Rousseau conceived of the State as the ideal educator of children. Indeed, in *The Confessions* one of the reasons Rousseau gives for having deposited his own children in an orphanage is that his abandonment of them would result in their becoming better citizens:

I will be content with a general statement that in handing my children over for the State to educate, for lack of means to bring them up myself, by destining them to become workers and peasants instead of adventurers and fortune-hunters, I thought I was acting as a citizen and a father, and looked upon myself as a member of Plato’s Republic. More than once since then the regret in my heart has told me that I was wrong. But for my reason having told me the same story, I have often blessed Heaven for having thus safeguarded them from their father’s fate, and from that which would have overtaken them at the moment when I should have been compelled to abandon them.²

In the above passage Rousseau acknowledges that he was wrong to abandon his children, but he holds to the belief that they are better off without him. He clearly believes he would have been a bad influence on his children.

² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1953), p.333.

suggesting that it is likely that they would have turned out to be adventurers or fortune-hunters if they had remained in his care. These two ‘professions’ are very individualistic pursuits and strongly contrast with his hope that his children would become workers or peasants. Rousseau’s aspirations for his children are universalist in nature; he imagines them as anonymous workers rather than speculating on the type of individuals they might have grown up to be. To understand Rousseau’s thinking it is useful to turn to an article he wrote for Diderot’s and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*, on ‘Political Economy’, in which he proposes a system of public education in which the state takes the place of fathers and so minimises the impact of individuals on a child’s developing sense of self. The education system Rousseau proposes is intended to ensure the production of good citizens:

The education of children should not be left to their father’s capacities and prejudices, especially since it is even more important to the state than to their fathers; for in the natural course of things the father’s death often deprives him of the ultimate benefits of having educated his child, but his country will sooner or later feel the effects of what he has done: the state remains while the family is dissolved. If the public authorities, by replacing fathers and fulfilling their important functions, acquire their rights in carrying out their duties, they have the less grounds for complaint since, in this respect, all that happens, properly speaking, is that they are described differently, and that under the name of citizens they hold the same authority, in common over their children as they had separately under the name of fathers; they will be as well obeyed when they speak in the name of the law as they were when speaking in the name of nature.³

By way of contrast in *Émile* (1762) Rousseau proposes that the ideal educator of a child is its own father. Moreover, whilst remaining true to many of the republican values that he expresses in, for example, *The Social Contract*, he articulates in *Émile* a deep sense of unease about modern society and culture, in particular urban culture and the emergence of a global economy supported by overseas trade. Rousseau may have been content to have children educated

³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Political Economy* in *Discourse on Political Economy and The Social Contract*, trans. Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999), p.23.

within a classical model of the republic, but by the time of writing *Émile* it is clear that he had become increasingly uneasy about the impact of the modern world on the shaping of young lives. Rousseau's understanding of how cultural and historical factors contribute to the production of subjectivities, and indeed how individuals, most notably a child's treatment at the hands of its mother or father, influence personality, reveal an awareness of the way that the self is constructed by outside factors. But Rousseau also retained the idea of an authentic self, the remnants of 'natural man', whose characteristics he describes in his *Second Discourse*. It is this self that Rousseau hoped to reveal in *Émile*, by removing, as far as is possible all the contaminants of modern life and culture, and bringing up his pupil in relative social isolation. In *Émile* an individual tutor is in total control of his pupil's learning environment. However, traces of Rousseau's republican thinking can be seen to persist in *Émile*, for though Rousseau acknowledges that in general it is the birth father's job to bring up his children, he insists that in the case of *Émile* his birth parents have no contact or influence over their child's education. Thus the relationship between Rousseau's tutor and his pupil is depersonalised. Particularly in early infancy the tutor's job is to facilitate his child's natural growth, not to develop a personal relationship with him. This is to ensure that, as far as possible, *Émile* grows as nature intended, that he is indeed the authentic article.

Here a contradiction emerges that is central to our discussion of all three writers. In order to become an autonomous, self-determined individual, one has to be detached from outside influences and so develop an independence of mind. But our sense of 'who we are' is in part informed by experiences and social encounters we have no control over. And yet we tend to understand our 'inner'

self as distinct from these encounters, as something we carry with us that is unaffected by external forces. But if, as Rousseau does, we remove social and cultural influences from a child's upbringing, do we then produce a person who is true to his own nature or just a socially dysfunctional one? All three writers, Rousseau, Wordsworth often implicitly and Mary Shelley more often than not explicitly, express an ontological anxiety of influence. This can be related to the concept of possessive individualism, and to the question of how much of who we are actually belongs to us.⁴

Rousseau's educational programme demands that children be allowed to grow up at their own pace with only the minimum of assistance. Stress is placed upon the natural landscape as an educational space, with Rousseau allowing children to learn through their physical interaction with their surroundings, commenting: 'The real object of our study is man and his environment' (*Émile*, I, p.10). In Rousseau's schema a child's earliest experience of itself should be a bodily one. For example Émile learns of the distinction between 'self' and 'not self' by reflecting on the sensations arising from material difference. Crucially, this sense of a distinction between 'self' and 'not self' does not produce the same sense of estrangement that a child feels when he comes to recognise human beings as other to him. Rousseau consciously postpones Émile's encounter with 'other' people for as long as possible, in the hope that by keeping Émile ignorant of society he will prevent him from suffering the trauma of alienation that accompanies a child's entrance into the social order.

⁴ The concept of possessive individualism is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Six, where the idea is discussed in relation to Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*. The discussion will use C.B. Macpherson's analysis of Locke to reveal Mary Shelley's criticism of possessive models of the self. See thesis pp.180-182.

However, Rousseau's attempt to keep the social world at bay undoubtedly compromises his claim that his educational programme is as close to nature as possible. For in order for things to remain 'natural' Émile's tutor must remain constantly vigilant and make interventions to ensure that things remain free from cultural contaminants. But in order to have an understanding of what these contaminants are he must of course have knowledge of the social world he is keeping at bay. Thus Émile's social ignorance and lack of self-consciousness depends upon his tutor's acute consciousness of the social world and its perils. From his charge's earliest infancy Rousseau's tutor must choose a wetnurse, but make sure that she is dispensed with once her duties have been performed and before her nursling develops too strong a bond with her. He must make sure that his little pupil does not engage in damaging conversations with household servants, for fear that they might contaminate him with their prejudices and superstitions. He must limit the contact that his pupil has with other children, and from what we might call the culture of childhood, for example children's fables or moral tales that might tempt him from his true path as the 'authentic child'.

As *Émile* progresses the more manipulative and less natural Rousseau's theory of education becomes and the more Rousseau's constructionist tendencies come to the fore. When Rousseau does finally allow Émile to enter the social world it is totally on his tutor's terms and with his guidance. For example when Émile 'chooses' a wife it just happens to be the woman Jean-Jacques intended for his protégé, a woman whose education conforms to Rousseau's exacting standards for females.

When we leave Émile at the end of the text he is to become a gentleman farmer living with his wife and children on his own estate. In this way he conforms to the ideology of possessive individualism, but, following his years of manipulation at the hands of his tutor, we may well ask whether Émile really is his own man. Moreover, Émile's being in possession of his own estate cannot disguise his dependence on his wife as homemaker. Rightly, much comment has been made of the gross unfairness of Rousseau's attitude to female education. But I want to highlight the way that Rousseau acknowledges that male subjectivity is dependent upon the presence of the female other. In Rousseau's writing women are often portrayed as the agents of culture, and that is why they are excluded from Émile's upbringing. In *Émile* women are associated with urban culture and conspicuous consumption. Women's sense of self is far more self-conscious and self-reflexive than men's: they are acutely aware of how they appear to others, and of their position in society. Rousseau finds this deeply threatening, but he also sees in women a type of self-awareness that men lack. Thus he proposes to educate women to subject themselves to men, and so provide the male with his missing complement. By domesticating women he hopes to make the home a space of retreat for the male self. So once again the idea of the autonomous individual is compromised, for in order for men to be their own proprietor, women must provide the ontological scaffolding upon which men's sense of individuality depends.

Chapters Three and Four consider how Wordsworth reacts against Enlightenment theories of education, but also how such thinking influenced him. In particular how he shares with Rousseau an anxiety about how social contact compromises the autonomy of the self, and how Wordsworth, by reacting against

the Enlightenment, manages to advance some of its ideological aspirations. In *The Prelude* (1805) Wordsworth addresses many of the contradictions that accompany Rousseau's attempt to produce an autonomous individual (key to this is the idea that autonomous individuals can be 'produced'), but in doing this Wordsworth reveals fresh contradictions of his own. In *The Prelude*, as far as is possible, we are presented with the biography of a self-made man, or at least a man whose personal and spiritual growth was not interfered with, or unduly influenced by human 'others'. This is not to say that Wordsworth does not accept the contribution of human agents to his childhood development. His description of his mother's contribution to his earliest years in Book Two acknowledges the debt he owes her. But crucially for Wordsworth once he is old enough to look after himself physically, the presence of 'others', though sometimes welcomed, is not allowed to detract from his own self-determined path to maturity.

Wordsworth is uncomfortable with the mechanistic and constructionist tendencies present in Enlightenment thought, particularly with the way in which thinkers like Rousseau, influenced by John Locke, believed that the genesis of understanding, including an individual's knowledge of himself, could be schematised so as to present a universally applicable model of self-formation. In doing this, both Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and Rousseau in *Émile* represent the development of subjectivity in terms of fixed stages of mental development, and present these stages of development, for example the refinement of a particular sensation, as seemingly detached from the development of the whole person. For Wordsworth such thinking presents human beings as little more than a fragmented collection of mental processes.

The idea of the self as separated into composite parts produces a sense of alienation, of a self-divided, rather than a unified concept of the self in control of its own mental faculties. Wordsworth counters the Enlightenment's stress on universals by stressing the specificity of his own childhood experiences.

Wordsworth represents himself as a unique individual motivated by spiritual forces whose origins and operations cannot be rationalised.

But in establishing his own uniqueness he must (and here he echoes Rousseau) downplay the influence of other human beings on his development. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth's mother recedes into the background long before her literal death, whereas his father appears to have contributed little or nothing to his son's development. Chapter Three explores Wordsworth's anxiety about the continuation of the maternal presence by analysing the 'Infant Babe' passage in Book Two of *The Prelude*, and Wordsworth's representation of mothers in two poems from the *Lyrical Ballads*, 'The Thorn' and 'The Mad Mother'. In contrast to the 'Infant Babe' passage, in which the mother is a benign presence up to the point of her withdrawal, the two poems from the *Lyrical Ballads* represent overbearing maternal desire as a potentially destructive and stifling influence on a child's development.

Chapter Four looks at the absence of male authority figures from Wordsworth's childhood. In Book Five of *The Prelude* Wordsworth makes clear his suspicion of Enlightenment pedagogues such as Rousseau, 'the Wardens of our faculties' (*The Prelude*, V, 377), and criticises their attempts to manage and direct children's developing minds. Wordsworth is conscious of how such men compromise childhood independence, and believes that the child who is forced to submit to their authority surrenders something of itself.

But crucially, Wordsworth's reaction to the model of the Enlightenment tutor does not involve an outright rejection of Enlightenment thinking. Rather it is an attempt to establish an ideological position that refuses any encroachment on the concept of autonomous individuality. Wordsworth is prepared to reject Enlightenment thinking that compromises this ideological stance, but he is also prepared to adapt aspects of Enlightenment thinking that support his demand for self-determination. For example, his concept of the natural landscape as a space that allows for both physical and spiritual growth has some distinctly Rousseauian undertones, as does his stress on the growing physical independence that the young Wordsworth achieves as a result of his solitary forays into the local countryside. Thus like Rousseau, Wordsworth stresses the importance of a child's encounter with his surroundings, but goes even further than Rousseau in rejecting the mediation of the experience of nature, by refusing to allow the presence, however inconspicuous, of any authority figure that might challenge the child's claim to autonomy. However, Wordsworth is also careful not to present his childhood self as a socially alienated figure alone in the natural world. In order to do this he rejects a materialist interpretation of nature and the natural world. Nature for Wordsworth is a spiritual realm that is aware of his presence, to the extent that where necessary it will intervene on his behalf. In Chapter Four I argue that the 'spiritualisation' of nature, its representation as an intentional space that is emotionally responsive to a child's needs, can only occur, and is in fact a psychological by-product of Wordsworth's socialisation, a process that was begun by his mother in infancy. It is too simplistic, and indeed factually inaccurate to represent Wordsworth as an antisocial child. But neither is his ability to be happiest in his own company, and the impression he gives of being

self-sufficient and independent, innate to his personality. In Chapter Four I reveal how Wordsworth's sense of autonomy is the product of the social world that he believes himself to be independent of, and how Wordsworth's sense of self-possession is not in fact the birthright he presents it as, but a negotiated 'settlement' established through his interaction with the social world.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven discuss Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In these chapters the relationship between socialisation and self-formation is brought into still sharper focus. The narrative the Creature delivers to Victor Frankenstein reveals that the Creature's sense of himself as an autonomous, self-determining individual, is acquired only when he has acquired a knowledge of the social world from which he is excluded, a knowledge that comes to him through his observations of the De Lacey family from a concealed position behind a blocked up window. Though physically marginal to the life of the cottagers, over time the Creature is inhabited by the culture he is observing. To the extent that, even when he is rejected by the De Laceys, he carries what he has learnt of their culture with him. But though inhabited by their culture, he is excluded from their society. Thus the Creature develops a sense of self-possession, of being dependent on himself and no one else, that is inseparable from his experience of social exclusion. The education he acquires from the De Laceys in which he learns about social and economic inequalities, the knowledge of which forces him to realise his own marginal status as a non-owner-occupier, also results in his recognition that he is in possession of very little but himself. In this way the Creature reveals the limits of Locke's model of possessive individualism which decrees that 'every Man has a property in their own person', and which, as C.B. Macpherson remarks, understood the individual as the

‘proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them’.⁵

For the Creature the realisation that he is his own proprietor causes him unbearable suffering resulting in a kind of psychological solitary confinement from which there is no escape.

Focussing on the Creature’s narrative of its early life, and with particular reference to Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Chapter Five examines Mary Shelley’s stress on the involuntary nature of knowledge acquisition. Shelley reveals through the Creature how the emotional experience of growing up is inseparable from the process of learning. Shelley stresses the Creature’s emotional responses to its earliest thoughts and sensations, responses that become increasingly more complex as its social awareness develops. Shelley’s stress on childhood feelings has parallels with Wordsworth’s, but for the fact that the Creature’s emotions are overwhelmingly negative, and more importantly because the intensity of these negative emotions increases along with its knowledge of its social alienation. For unlike the young Wordsworth the Creature has no choice but to be alone, and certainly does not crave solitude. The Creature’s sense of independence, of being his own man, results in him living a nightmare existence of unending psychological pain. Moreover the pain he is feeling is something that takes *possession* of him. The Creature may appear to be independent and autonomous, in the sense that his actions are not controlled by ‘others’, but he is not in control of himself because he is not fully in control of his emotions - emotions that constantly threaten to transform themselves into destructive impulses.

⁵ See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999), pp.287-288. C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977), p.3.

Mary Shelley's novel exposes the myth behind the ideology of possessive individualism. For what the Creature's narrative reveals is that in order for an individual to proclaim himself independent he must belong to a community that he can claim independence from. Both *Émile* and the young William Wordsworth are presented as valued members of society when and if they choose to be so (though of course this assertion is fraught with contradictions). But when an individual has his independence, but belongs to no community, then he is an exile, and if he was to declare his independence then his declaration would be meaningless, precisely because it would fall on deaf ears. Thus declarations of independence depend for their validity on being overheard. The ideology of possessive individualism is the ideology of a class fraction, even though in declaring his independence the individual in question appears to be denying membership of it.

However to say that the Creature is not a member of society is also too simplistic; though, certainly, he is not a *recognised* member of society, the Creature is something of a cultural gate-crasher. Chapter Six analyses how the socialisation the Creature experiences as a result of observing the De Lacey family, and particularly his acquisition of language, complicates the assumption that he is a marginal figure. As his narrative develops it becomes clear that the Creature has internalised the cultural values of his 'hosts', to the extent that he begins to articulate aspects of the very ideology that excludes him. Chapter Six begins by looking at Locke and Rousseau's theories of language in *An Essay on Human Understanding* and *Émile*, and particularly the way that both writers attempt to maintain a close relationship between the acquisition of knowledge, and the development of language. Both philosophers insist that a child, or an

adult for that matter, should not know more words than it has ideas for. In other words a child's linguistic development should not exceed its intellectual development. Both philosophers stress individual experience over the collective experience of communication. The Creature's narrative complicates Locke's and Rousseau's theories, for as the Creature learns a language he is simultaneously enveloped within a culture that he has no direct experience of as an active participant. The model of the individual that the Creature inherits along with its acculturation conforms to the ideology of possessive individualism. This ideology takes possession of him, allowing him to believe he is in possession of himself. This in turn produces the hope that, by confronting his creator and utilising his expertise, he might construct a future for himself free from the society that has excluded him. But, and here there is a parallel with Rousseau's *Émile*, the Creature can only become self-sufficient through the reassuring presence of the female other.

Frankenstein reveals how the concept of autonomous individuality is not an innate birthright but an ideological inheritance. With a view to this Chapter Seven examines the childhood of Victor Frankenstein, and in particular the way Victor has instilled in him a sense of vocation, of duty to a calling, that closely resembles Max Weber's concept of the Protestant work ethic as elaborated in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The history of the Frankensteins' hometown of Geneva, the home of Calvinism, relates it to this emergent, increasingly secularised ideology. Victor's father, Alphonse Frankenstein, has a sense of vocation intimately related to the idea of public service. Indeed he scales down his public duties in order that he might fulfil another of his social obligations and provide the state with children. There are clear parallels here

with Rousseau who ‘gave’ his children up in order that they might become good citizens, though of course Alphonse doesn’t abandon his children in order to fulfil his civic duty. There are further parallels with *Émile* in the way Alphonse educates his children. For Alphonse as for Rousseau parenting is a vocation. The enlightened Alphonse uses kindness and friendship to educate his children rather than discipline and fear. But Alphonse also instils in his children, as does Rousseau in *Émile*, a sense of their obligation to him. In theory they are free to follow their own destinies, but in reality they are obliged to act in accordance with their father’s expectations. Victor’s childhood is determined in relation to a utilitarian agenda. All activities must be useful and have a clear purpose. The fact that certain aspects of Victor’s adult life appear to have already been mapped out for him during his childhood, and his experience of childhood as a vocation, produces in Victor what Max Weber describes as the inner loneliness of the single individual. This loneliness is not born of social isolation, as is the Creature’s, but is the product of a form of social inculcation that represses forms of self-expression that do not conform to a predetermined set of cultural values.

By embarking on his project of discovering how to animate dead matter, Victor appears to confound his father’s expectations. But Victor cannot free himself from the ideology he was brought up with, and replaces one self-consuming vocation with another. By taking possession of a vocation of his own choosing it might be assumed that Victor takes control of his destiny, and so takes possession of himself, but it soon becomes clear that his vocation has taken possession of him, as he has no life outside the work he is doing. Moreover his labour is unending, for following the completion of his work his creation returns to insist that he continue in his ‘vocation’. It is as if his offspring is the inheritor

of the work ethic that originally motivated him. The Creature is explicit about the loneliness that compels him to call his creator to labour on his behalf. The Creature's experience of loneliness reflects Victor's inner loneliness that he attempts to hide from view. Thus Frankenstein reveals the emotional, psychological and social costs of self-possession, which always and necessarily involves some form of dispossession both in relation to the self and society.

Émile, *The Prelude*, and *Frankenstein* do not provide us with a uniform model of the self; indeed both Wordsworth and Shelley develop a model of self-formation that is critical of as well as being influenced by Rousseau's. The three texts have been chosen because of the way they can be made to stand in dialectical tension with one another, showing the contradictions and limits in each others' argument, and in so doing producing fresh contradictions of their own. Moreover, all three texts present or address the idea that the modern subject *must* be distinct from society, and have an inner life of his own. The logic of this is that some level of alienation is a price worth paying in order to achieve independence and self-determination. As a study of masculinity I hope not only to show how writers such as Rousseau and Wordsworth contribute to the emergence of a distinctly individualist ideology but also how they are victims of it, particularly how male middle-class children in this period were forced to reconcile themselves to their status as social orphans, and to internalise the ideology of possessive individualism to the extent that they became agents of its propagation.

Chapter One

It's a Boy: Rousseau and the Birth of the Enlightened Subject

Alienating Knowledge

Of all human sciences the most useful and most imperfect appears to me to be that of mankind: and I will venture to say, the single inscription on the Temple of Delphi [know thyself] contained a precept more difficult and more important than is to be found in all the huge volumes that moralists have ever written.

(*Second Discourse* p.43)

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer describe how Enlightenment ideology involves 'the projection onto nature of the subjective', with every question concerning the mysteries of life responded to with the answer Oedipus gave to the Sphinx's riddle: "It is man" is the Enlightenment stereotype repeatedly offered as information, irrespective of whether it is faced with a piece of objective intelligence, a bare schematisation, fear of evil powers, or hope of redemption.'⁶ In Adorno's and Horkheimer's view the 'content' of a given object is in reality a reflection of 'knowledge', the knowledge of its nature, a knowledge that emanates from the enlightened subject rather than residing in the object itself. In this way subject and object exist in mimetic relationship to one another. But paradoxically Enlightenment rationalism must disregard the production of content, denying the mimetic structure of the subject-object relationship. It neutralises objects by demanding their equivalence within the grand scheme of things – the natural order.

⁶ Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso 1997), p.7.

In the light of Adorno's and Horkheimer's observations it should perhaps come as no surprise that the object of greatest intellectual curiosity for Rousseau was 'Man', and that the imperative 'know thyself' was the guiding imperative of much of his thinking. However, what is remarkable about Rousseau is the way that he anticipates Adorno's and Horkheimer's assertion, also made in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that the pursuit of this kind of knowledge results in the pursuer becoming estranged from the object of his study, in this case himself:

It is still more cruel that, as every advance made by the human species removes it still further from its primitive state, the more discoveries we make, the more we deprive ourselves of the means of making the most important of all. Thus it is, in one sense, by our very study of man, that knowledge of him is put out of our power. (*Second Discourse* p.43)

Here we are presented with one of the most important of Rousseau's paradoxes: that knowledge of ourselves alienates us from our nature, as human nature becomes an object of study, and so divorced from the human being who is studying it. Of course, all this does not prevent him from believing in man's essential nature, and of conceiving of an original archetype that reveals what man truly 'is'. The declaration 'it is man' that Rousseau makes in the *Second Discourse* is by his own admission speculative as we are too far advanced from our original state to truly know ourselves. By speculating on our past self, which is also our 'true' self, we are able to speculate on our present deformity, and so posit a lack that is based upon a speculation of otherness that has no basis in historical fact but only in the assumption of historical transformation: 'For it is by no means a light undertaking to distinguish properly between what is original and what is artificial in the actual nature of man, or to form a true idea of a state which no longer exists, perhaps never did exist, and probably never will exist:

and of which it is, nevertheless, necessary to have a true idea, in order to form a proper judgement of our present state' (*Second Discourse* p.44). So the modern self is the self transformed, a self somehow at odds with itself. The truth of our authentic self has floated free of history, to the extent that we cannot be totally sure that we have ever been, or will ever be, what we truly are. Moreover it is only by reflecting on our inauthenticity that we can gain the intimation of our 'lost' authenticity. Rousseau's speculation on the nature of man complicates Adorno's and Horkheimer's very useful observations of Enlightenment ideology, because Rousseau's tentative declaration 'it is man' is riven with anxiety and uncertainty both in relation to his own subjective position and in relation to the object of his study. It is clear that Rousseau's own sense of alienation, both from himself as a modern man and from civilisation, results in his making a psychological investment in his model of an idealised primitive man who cannot experience alienation because he has no concept of society. So the projection that takes place is a negative one as it involves a rewinding of history to a mythic age of 'unknowing'. But, as Rousseau acknowledges, we cannot turn back the clock, knowledge once acquired cannot be dispensed with. In the *Second Discourse* Rousseau attempts to identify the social processes that led to the present state of unhappiness.

In the *Second Discourse* Rousseau conceives of natural man living at one with nature, isolated but content in himself and harming no one, motivated by self-love but also capable of pity (pity is the result of a limited form of identification grounded in self-love). This is Rousseau's original ideal. However, something went wrong with the setting in train of cause and effect. Social interaction over time led to the emergence of loose social bonds and

increasing interdependence, separating man from his 'natural' state of isolation. With the emergence of the concept of private property, and the social inequality and hierarchies that arise from this, man was forced away from nature and towards civilisation.

Rousseau's break with the doctrine of original sin is often cited as a radical departure from the dogma of the Church. The universality of sin is replaced by an essentialised concept of human goodness. Rousseau claims that man is born good and that pre-civilised or natural man was fundamentally good. However, Rousseau does not mean good in terms of being moral, for morality is associated with the knowledge of good and evil. What Rousseau means by good is in fact a state of amorality - a state of blissful ignorance that excludes the knowledge of good and evil.

Rousseau replaces the doctrine of original sin with a myth of pre-civilised authenticity. Every human action, thought, intention, motivation that deviates from what is natural (and what is natural is self-producing) is by this logic a corruption of the natural order of things. In a sense Rousseau's theory echoes the doctrine of original sin, as for Rousseau the acquisition of knowledge and its application is still the source of man's plight. However, Rousseau's theory makes less sense than the doctrine of original sin he claims to repudiate, for in Genesis Adam and Eve are tempted to eat of the tree of knowledge by an outside agent – the serpent. But what motivates Rousseau's natural man to transgress and forsake his state of happiness? If he is essentially good then there is nothing *in him* that would motivate him to deviate from the path of nature.⁷ Thus his only

⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* responds to some of the contradictions in Rousseau's theological thinking: 'the paradoxical exclamation, that God has made all things right, and that error has been introduced by the creature, whom he formed, knowing what he formed, is as unphilosophical as impious'. What is of particular note in

motivation must reside in ‘others’, but no single other, for isolated individuals are ‘good’. The only way Rousseau can account for this is with a theory of deviation in which mutual need leads to socialisation, the extent of which increases over time. Thus dialogue, interaction and exchange over time produce an objectified form of knowledge that belongs to no single individual but is produced collectively by *the group*. Over time, through social and cultural differentiation, through the division of labour, through a mapping of the material world, a social space is established with its own customs, habits and institutions that are utterly distinct from the ‘natural order of things’. In other words there is a move from the universal (the universal nature of natural man), to the particular (the localised particularity of a given cultural group). So in Rousseau’s philosophy, society takes on an objectified form. However, beneath the debris of civilisation, man’s essential nature remains intact. Rousseau engineers a theoretical split between a homogenous totalised and trans-historical concept of ‘Man’ that is universally applicable, and a localised particularism in which a given society produces cultural identities.

However, though every development that takes us away from the state of nature contributes to humanity’s eventual corruption, not every step along the road to civilisation is presented in a completely negative light. For example, the point in human history when human beings had learnt to construct shelters, and were living together in intimate family groups is said by Rousseau to have given

Wollstonecraft’s response is how as a woman strongly influenced by Enlightenment ideals, she is unable to accept, and in fact finds illogical, Rousseau’s negative conception of human progress: ‘But if, to crown the whole, there were to be rational creatures produced, allowed to rise in excellence by the exercise of powers implanted for that purpose; if benignity itself thought fit to call into existence a creature above the brutes, who could think and improve himself, why should that inestimable gift, for a gift it was, if man was so created as to have a capacity to rise above the state in which sensation produced brutal ease, be called, in direct terms, a curse?’. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Janet Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993), p.78; pp.78-79.

rise to ‘the finest feelings known to humanity. conjugal love and paternal affection’ (*Second Discourse* p.88). Responding to this Susan Meld Shell contends that for Rousseau the ‘happiest and most durable epoch’ in human history was not when human beings were living as isolated individuals, but in their earliest forms of co-habitation.⁸ As Shell points out, the real beneficiaries of co-habitation were women. Before the establishment of family groups Rousseau describes how the sexes would meet to procreate in relative anonymity, and when the sexual act was complete would go their separate ways. For men this left them free of responsibility, whereas women were left in a vulnerable state having to birth and rear their children. The establishment of social groups resulted in the emergence of monogamous relationships, with the father acting as protector to his partner and child. Rousseau comments in *Émile*: ‘Though a man does not brood like a pigeon, and though he has no milk to suckle the young, and must in this respect be classed with the quadrupeds, his children are feeble and helpless for so long a time, that mother and children could ill dispense with the father’s affection, and the care which results from it’ (*Émile*, V, p.471).

Clearly co-habitation brings palpable benefits to women, but it is less clear whether Rousseau believes it brings equivalent benefits to men. Shell is right to point out that socialisation is not always described in a negative way, but overall Rousseau’s message in the *Second Discourse* seems to be that interdependence on any level between human beings in a state of nature will eventually lead us in the direction of inequality and unhappiness:

[S]o long as they undertook only what a single person could accomplish, and confined themselves to such arts as did not require the joint labour of several

⁸ Susan Meld Shell, ‘*Émile*: Nature and the Education of Sophy’, *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001), p.280.

hands, they lived free, healthy, honest, and happy lives, in so far as nature allowed. and they continued to enjoy the pleasures of mutual and independent intercourse. But from the moment one man began to stand in need of the help of another; from the moment it appeared advantageous to any one man to have enough provisions for two, equality disappeared, property was introduced, work became indispensable, and vast forests became smiling fields, which man had to water with the sweat of his brow, and where slavery and misery were soon seen to germinate and grow up with the crops. (*Second Discourse*, p.92)

In the *Second Discourse* Rousseau does not point the finger at women directly for being the cause of man's misery. But as has been shown women, because of their role as mothers, do benefit far more from co-operation and co-habitation than men. Moreover, when in the above extract Rousseau cites as one of the causes of our move towards civilisation the realisation that it would be advantageous to have provisions enough for two, it can be surmised that the couple he had in mind are husband and wife. Of course mothers, having another mouth to feed, would already be put in the position of finding provisions enough for two, and of thus being in a situation of interdependence that would benefit from increased co-operation with others. The benefits of civilisation then appear in Rousseau's schema to be more than a little one-sided.

Women are also portrayed as being agents of socialisation because of the rivalry they inspire between men. As social interaction increases beyond the confines of the family hut, men start to compete for the attention of the most beautiful women, for example singing and dancing in front of the hut of the woman they desire in the hope of impressing her. In its most extreme form this rivalry would result in violence and even death. Most disturbingly it results in discrimination on the grounds of preference, encouraging ideas of value and merit that contribute to the growth of inequality. In *Émile* Rousseau cites coquettishness as a 'natural' attribute of women, and makes much of the way women manipulate men to their own ends; in the *Second Discourse* he stops

short of blaming women for humanity's misery but by the time of *Émile* he seems more than happy to point the finger at women. The authoritarian education he imposes on women in Book Five, Rousseau informs us, is in part women's own fault because of the destructive passions they inspire in men, passions beyond the power of men to fully satisfy. Rousseau insists that women master the art of self-control, not for their own sake, but for the sake of men: 'the life of a good woman is a perpetual struggle against self; it is only fair that woman should bear her share of the ills she has brought upon man' (*Émile* p.398). Of course, the representation of women as temptresses has a long history in Judeo-Christian culture. In Rousseau's schema women act as catalysts for men's socialisation, and so are at least in part responsible for man leaving the state of nature. If we look again at the above extract where Rousseau describes how interdependence led inevitably to men having to expend the sweat of their brows, only to live in virtual slavery, then we will see that it bears a strong similarity to the Genesis myth, where the source of man's new found knowledge, and his present state of misery, is indeed a woman:

Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it', cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground.⁹

Rousseau incorporates, albeit it in secularised form, some of the key ideological components of the Judeo-Christian creation myth, including the symbolic position of Woman as the spur to the acquisition of 'knowledge', and the negative consequences of this. However, too direct a parallel cannot be drawn because Rousseau does not subscribe to the key concept contained in

⁹ N.R.S.V. Genesis 3.17-19.

Genesis - the idea of original sin. In *Émile* Rousseau does not offer us a creation myth, but rather a re-creation myth. By marrying aspects of Enlightenment Ideology and Christian thinking, he produces for us a new Adam in the form of his prodigy, Émile. Rousseau is careful not to introduce his Adam, Émile, to his Eve, Sophy, until he has reached adulthood. During his childhood Émile's contact with women is kept to a minimum, for fear that they might tempt him from the true path that is Rousseau's educational programme. However, Rousseau does not dispense with women all together: as Shell rightly asserts, Rousseau felt a strong attraction to the family life of pre-civilised man. Shell points out that Rousseau saw the romance of Émile and Sophy as an idealised version of 'the history of our species', with Émile educated to be as close to the ideal of the natural man as possible, and with Sophy educated to acquire the best attributes that Rousseau associated with humanity's earliest domesticity. Thus Sophy is the kind of woman who can help her husband to recreate this lost ideal of family life.¹⁰

The Enlightenment's concept of nature, with its emphasis on natural determinism, combined with its concept of man's universal nature led Rousseau to the conclusion that a child, brought up in a 'natural' environment, would develop into a natural man. The state of nature then had not been lost, but endlessly returns in the form of children unaccustomed to and therefore uncorrupted by the world. This can be linked to Christian thinking and iconography, with the figure of the Christ child who holds out the possibility of redemption to a fallen world. Indeed Rousseau's Émile can be seen as a rationalisation of the immaculate conception: Émile is an orphan, his parents

¹⁰ Susan Meld Shell '*Émile*: Nature and the Education of Sophy', p.278; pp. 272-294.

having voluntarily given him up to his tutor, leaving the child relatively free of the added 'complications' of familial and cultural ties. Rousseau attempts through his educational programme to create a radically new form of consciousness by harnessing natural forces. This has parallels with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. But whereas Victor Frankenstein plays with the material substances that produce life, Rousseau attempts to put together, stage by stage, the mind of a man.

Rousseau's Materialism and the Education of the Senses

We are born capable of learning, but knowing nothing, perceiving nothing. The mind, bound up within imperfect and half grown organs, is not even aware of its own existence. The movements and cries of the new-born child are purely reflex, without knowledge or will.' (*Émile*, I, p.32)

Rousseau's description of the newly born infant as an unformed and undirected mass of impulses and sensations is distinctly modern. For example, it bears comparison with Freud's conception of the newly born as a polymorphously perverse bundle of undirected corporeal drives¹¹. Rousseau's materialism is also modern in its recognition that the human infant is not just a man or woman in miniature, but is psychologically unformed. This relates, for example, to a child's lack of awareness concerning its own body, its material environment, the distinction between subject and object and its abilities concerning spatial differentiation and orientation. Rousseau's concept of the newly born develops the *tabula rasa* theory of human development championed by Locke in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Rousseau understands the importance of childhood as a developmental stage central to the

¹¹ See Freud's 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' *The Penguin Freud Library*, Vol.7, ed. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1991)

formation of human consciousness. Alan Richardson draws attention to a passage in *Émile* that he suggests may have influenced Mary Shelley in her description of the Creature's emergence into consciousness in which Rousseau describes the likely consequences of the birth of a fully-grown man:¹²

Suppose a child was born with the size and strength of manhood, entering upon life full grown like Pallas from the brain of Jupiter; such a child-man would be a perfect idiot, an automaton, a statue without motion and almost without feeling; he would see and hear nothing, he would recognise no one, he could not turn his eyes towards what he wanted to see; not only would he perceive no external objects, he would not even be aware of sensation through the several sense-organs. (*Émile*, I, p.32)

Rousseau does not make the mistake of Victor Frankenstein whose creation is a fully formed man. Nevertheless his basic ideology and entrenched materialism have strong parallels with Frankenstein's but for the fact that Rousseau realises the importance of an extended incubation period. The sensual body of the child is the raw material from which Rousseau seeks to mould a new form of consciousness, allowing it to develop slowly at its own pace, in a form of 'negative education'.

Rousseau recognises three forms of education: by nature, by men and by things. The former occurs naturally through the physical growth and the psychological development of the body and sense organs. Education by men is something that Rousseau wants to avoid for as long as possible, because of his view of the corrupting influence of civilisation, but he does concede its significance from a utilitarian perspective, as it teaches the child the use value of 'things'. Of the three types of education Rousseau's principal concern is 'the education of things', which he describes as 'what we gain by our experience of our surroundings' (*Émile*, I, p.6). Rousseau releases his fictional child into a

¹² Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994), pp. 205-205.

natural landscape, in order that he may experience the widest variety of sensations possible. The child's sensory experiences are crucial to his developing spatial awareness and to the child's sense of its own *bodily location* within the material world. Rousseau instructs:

He wants to touch and handle everything; do not check these movements which teach him invaluable lessons. Thus he learns to perceive the heat, cold, hardness, softness, weight, or lightness of bodies, to judge their size and shape and all their physical properties, by looking, feeling, listening, and, above all, by comparing sight and touch, by judging with the eye what sensation they would cause to his hand. (*Émile*, I, p.36)

Following this passage, Rousseau makes the assertion that even a child's concept of self and other is grounded in materiality. Rousseau does not then conceive of the emergence of a discourse of the self in early infancy, but rather conceives of the development of a wider sensory field that *contains* the self. Shifting positionalities over time teach the child of its status as a locatable, but moving body, contained within a spatio-temporal field: 'It is only by movement that we learn the difference between self and not self; it is only by our own movements that we gain the idea of space' (The movement of the body here involves a movement in time). To draw a distinction between self and environment, or indeed self and not self is to miss Rousseau's point. In Rousseau's thinking the inside/outside dichotomy that plagues modern concepts of the self is elided. The child inhabits not itself but its immediate environment, with self and environment (not-self) as contingent categories.

Rousseau's education of the senses through the experience of 'things' allows the child to gain a sense of perspective on the world and to develop a sense of its *place* in the wider scheme of things. This mapping of self and environment lies at the heart of Rousseau's concept of rationality, for it involves

an awareness of the ratio of things. However, Rousseau's pronounced materialism does not allow him to overstep the mark between the sensory self and its material context. For example, he distinguishes between the ability to orientate oneself spatially, which he associates with the imagination, and the material nature of things - reality. For Rousseau, our sense of perspective is illusory, a means of mapping the material world: 'If we perceive the real dimensions of things, we should know nothing of space; everything would seem close to our eyes' (II, p.124). This helps to explain Rousseau's merging of self and environment. The concept of 'environment' is the product of the subjective imagination. The child's environment only becomes imbued with meaning *as space*, as a result of the spatial perspective that arises from the child's cognitive mapping of its material environment through its sensory engagement with it. So such concepts as proximity, distance, expanse and so on, are all functions of the imagination, and correspond to the dimensions of the self. Our concept of our immediate environment involves a *representation* of reality, not reality itself, what is gained is a *perspective* on the nature of things.

The emergence of the imagination in childhood involves the awakening of desires resulting from an expansion in 'the bounds of possibility'. Rousseau's pedagogy seeks to contain this expansion by restricting the child's immediate environment: 'The world of reality has its bounds, the world of imagination is boundless, as we cannot enlarge the one, let us restrict the other; for all the sufferings which really make us miserable arise from the difference between the real and the imaginary' (*Émile*, II, p52). The horizon that Rousseau seeks to hide from the child's view is the prospects and possibilities offered by European civilisation, and the allurements that arise from the siren calls of the modern

metropolis. Rousseau does not want his child's mind infected by the European Imperialist and Capitalist imagination, with its dream of places and things beyond its reach:

Thus we grasp everything, we cling to everything; we are anxious about time, place, people, things, all that is and will be; we ourselves are but the least part of ourselves. We spread ourselves, so to speak, over the whole world, and all this vast expanse becomes sensitive. No wonder our woes increase when we may be wounded on every side. How many princes make themselves miserable for the loss of lands they never saw, and how many merchants lament in Paris over some misfortune in the Indies! (*Émile*, II, p.55)

The Imperialist imagination spreads itself across the globe rendering merchants and traders 'sensitive' to dangers occurring thousands of miles away. Rousseau's language suggests that the dimensions of the Imperialist imagination are a projection of the body's limits. The European imagination takes the shape of a man spread Gulliver-like over a vast expanse of land and sea. Rousseau attempts to 'protect' his child from the horrors of the historical present by controlling the dimensions of his imagination. He does this by controlling his environment and by refusing to allow the child to come into contact with objects or people that might act as signposts pointing towards the existence of a wider world beyond the child's immediate surroundings. However, Rousseau's desire to protect his pupil by controlling his environment should be treated with scepticism. Rousseau may make spirited attacks on Imperialism and the slave trade, but the logic of his educational programme reflects the same logic of domination. Rousseau intends to colonise Émile's imagination and to harness his will. All this can be done, Rousseau informs us, without sacrificing Émile's sense of freedom:

[L]et him always think he is master while you are really master. There is no subjection so complete as that which preserves the forms of freedom; it is thus that the will itself is taken captive. Is not this poor child, without knowledge, strength,

or wisdom, entirely at your mercy? Are you not master of his whole environment so far as it affects him? Cannot you make of him what you please? (*Émile*, II, p.100)

Throughout *Émile* Rousseau describes the automaton and puppet-like nature of conventionally brought up children, but it is Rousseau who has brought into being an automaton. By combining a universalised concept of human nature with environmental determinism, Rousseau is certain that his educational programme will produce a fixed, non-variable outcome. Even when Émile takes ‘possession’ of himself, Rousseau feels assured that his creation will act in accordance with his will: ‘So long as I could not get the mastery over his will, I retained my control over his person; I never left him for a moment. Now I sometimes leave him to himself because I control him continually’ (*Émile*, IV p.356). Émile, like a clockwork toy, is released in order to act in accordance with his programming. Once again parallels can be drawn with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. In both *Émile* and *Frankenstein* ‘the human’ is emptied out. Enlightenment Ideology scoops the soul out of the human subject, replacing it with a materialist mechanistic conception of the self. Gone are questions concerning free will, with complex notions of human motivation and intentionality replaced by ‘natural’ inclinations and the acting out of mechanistic instincts. Enlightenment ideology has turned its eyes inwards, and is attempting to colonise itself by colonising childhood as the originating source of the self, in a paradoxical drive to preserve the illusion of freedom in adult life

In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer link the Enlightenment drive to dominate nature with a dictator’s need to dominate the people he rules over: ‘Men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power. Enlightenment behaves towards

things as a dictator towards men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them'.¹³ The figure of Émile captures this logic perfectly. Émile is both man and object, as quite late into his childhood Rousseau conceives of his creation as being 'little more than a body', and recommends that he be 'treat[ed] as such' (*Émile*, II, p.180). The merging of the split between Émile as a human subject and as a material object has a profoundly alienating affect on us as readers. How should we relate to Émile? What exactly are his rights, and what are our rights in relation to him? What gives us as adults the right to manipulate and govern him?

In order to have dominion over the 'realm' of childhood Rousseau must distance us from it. Rousseau demands that adults and children keep their place by remaining in their own distinct zones of consciousness: 'Mankind has its place in the sequence of things; childhood has its place in the sequence of human life; the man must be treated as a man and the child as a child. Give each his place and keep him there.' (*Émile*, II, p.51) Human life is mapped into developmental stages of consciousness, as we pass from one stage to another we become alienated from the stages we have passed through. The passage from childhood to adulthood involves the recognition of one's place in the human life cycle. One becomes an adult when one recognises that one is no longer a child. So in the gateway between childhood and adulthood stands the figure of the child: childhood in an objectified form. To take one's place as an adult involves an act of renunciation through this objectification of childhood. This in turn allows us to have dominion over children, but it can also result in our alienation from childhood. As childhood is transformed into a universal category the child we once were becomes a stranger to us.

¹³Adorno, Theodor W. and Horkheimer, Max. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso 1997), p.9.

Outward Bound

Rousseau's materialism is not as 'neutral' as it first appears. The bundle of sensations and reflexes that Rousseau educates into consciousness is, for example, male and Rousseau will have it no other way. Rousseau also demands that his pupil be able-bodied. Significantly, Rousseau associates physical disability with effeminacy, whereas masculinity is associated with physical prowess and the ability to adapt to environmental change. Also, as we have seen, Rousseau's materialist concept of self and not-self is likely to lead him to the conclusion that physical disability would impact upon a child's spatial awareness and therefore its concept of self. His association of physical disability with confinement leads to a description of the infirm as walking corpses: 'What matter if they make the dead walk, we have no need of corpses; they fail to give us men, and it is men we need' (*Émile*, I, p.26). Rousseau sees the salvation of civilisation as involving the production of strong and healthy men, and leaves the fate of those who do not fit into this category in the balance. From his rhetoric one suspects that Rousseau is content to leave them to die. Rousseau's educational programme allows children to sink or swim, offering them the bare minimum of assistance. Rousseau says that children should be dipped in 'the waters of the Styx'. The symbolism here is important for the Styx is the river in Hades that marks the crossing point between life and death. Émile is initiated into a masculine realm of action man machismo. He must undergo certain privations and physical hardships to prove his worth as a man:

Accustom them therefore to the hardship they will have to face; train them to endure extremes of temperature, climate, and condition, hunger, thirst and weariness. Dip them in the waters of the Styx. (*Émile*, I, p.17)

Not only must Rousseau's pupil be male and able-bodied but he must also be a white European. Rousseau justifies this by employing his familiar rhetoric of environmental determinism. Different climates, Rousseau informs us, produce different national characteristics, for example Rousseau regards Negroes and Laps as being less wise than Europeans.¹⁴ He also remarks that these two racial groups, coming from extreme climates, are unable to adapt to extreme environmental changes. Europeans on the other hand, particularly those coming from the temperate zone which conveniently enough includes France, are able to adapt to a wide range of climates: 'A Frenchman can live in New Guinea or in Lapland, but a Negro cannot live in Tornea nor a Samoyed in Benin' (*Émile*, I, p.22). The logic of Imperialism here is undeniable, with Europeans uniquely adapted to globetrotting and colonisation. Finally Rousseau demands that his child come with a dowry, for though an orphan Émile has inherited wealth. Rousseau is content for the poor to bring up their own children: 'the poor may come to manhood without our help' (*Émile*, I, p.23).

¹⁴ The idea that climate and environment contributed to national characteristics was not unique to Rousseau. For example Montesquieu in *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748) suggested that the South Asian climate sapped people's mental and physical strength making them lethargic and intellectually lazy. This problem was compounded by the fact that the land needed little effort to cultivate, and so did not provide an incentive for development and innovation, leaving Asians behind the more developed Europeans. Rousseau's thinking even more closely resembles that of the Comte de Buffon who in his *Natural History, General and Particular* put forward the view that the geographical position of Southern Europeans marked them out as a classificatory standard by which other racial groups should be measured: 'The most temperate climate lies between the 40th and 50th degree of latitude, and it produces the most handsome and beautiful men. It is from this climate that the ideas of the genuine colour of mankind, and the various degrees of beauty, ought to be derived. The extremes are equally remote from truth and from beauty' (quoted in *The Great Map of Mankind* p.245). For a discussion of these theories see P.J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perception of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons 1982). The first 15 volumes of Buffon's *Natural History* were published in Paris between 1749 and 1767.

Émile as an enlightened wealthy white European male is the type of person that Rousseau and the other *philosophes* looked towards to push forward the boundaries of the Enlightenment project. In this way we might see Émile as a potential explorer who will discover new domains as yet untouched by Enlightenment ideology.¹⁵ In this section I want to focus on another adventurer by drawing a comparison between Émile and the epic explorer Odysseus as portrayed in Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Émile's education allows him to gain a sense of location and perspective in relation to his environment. Through a rationalisation of space Émile gains *the lie of the land*. His spatial awareness creates a knowledge/power dynamic that allows him to adapt to changes in his environment but also to forecast possible dangers and hazards and so avoid them. Rousseau puts stress on developing the skills of orientation. Indeed certain sections of Émile seem to more resemble a boy-scout manual than an educational treatise. For example, he describes an instance in which he and his pupil find themselves lost in a forest. They are lost by design, as it is an orientation exercise set up by Rousseau to see if Émile can find his way home unassisted. Émile represents a model of the bourgeois traveller who, snail-like, carries his home with him, but can also find his way back to his 'fixed estate' or 'homeland'. This parallels the description of Odysseus in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

Though trembling and shipwrecked, the hero anticipates the work of the compass. Though he is powerless, no part of the sea remains unknown to him, and so his powerlessness also indicates that the mighty powers will be put down. But the evident untruth in myths, the deception of the claim that the waters and the earth are actually inhabited by demons, the magical deceit of inherited popular religion, becomes in the eyes of the mature traveller something that is merely 'misleading',

¹⁵ Yet another parallel to *Frankenstein* presents itself here, with Émile being comparable to the explorer Robert Walton.

in contradistinction to the unequivocal purposiveness of his own self-preservation, and his return to his homeland and fixed estate.¹⁶

In the above extract Adorno and Horkheimer describe Odysseus' domination of the mythic realm of the supernatural. Rousseau describes this realm when speculating on pre-history:

Thus man began by thinking that all things whose action affected him were alive. He did not recognise the limits of their powers, and he therefore supposed that they were boundless; as soon as he had supplied them with bodies they became his gods. In earliest times men went in terror of everything and everything seemed alive. The idea of matter was developed as slowly as that of spirit, for the former is itself an abstraction. Thus the universe was peopled with gods like themselves. The stars, the winds and the mountains, rivers, trees, and towns, their very dwellings, each had its soul, its god, its life. (*Émile*, IV, p.262)

Earlier in this section I described the Enlightenment explorer as expanding the bounds of the 'known' world, but in doing this, the Enlightenment had to restrict the bounds of the 'unknown' world by containing the imagination. The Enlightenment transforms the 'boundless' realm of magic, where everything 'seemed alive', to a natural realm of dead matter. An interesting example, and one that brings out the rhetoric of light and darkness that characterised so much Enlightenment thinking, is the episode in *Émile* where Rousseau stresses the importance of teaching children not to fear the dark. Rousseau here inadvertently supplies us with a dialectical image to represent Enlightenment: a man standing in the dark secure in the knowledge of his surroundings. With his usual machismo Rousseau berates those adults who still succumb to a fear of the dark:

I have seen thinkers, unbelievers, philosophers, exceedingly brave by daylight, tremble like women at the rustling of a leaf in the dark. This terror is put down to nurses' tales; this is a mistake; it has a natural cause. What is this cause? What

¹⁶ Adorno, Theodor W. and Horkheimer, Max, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso 1997), p.47.

makes the deaf suspicious and the lower classes superstitious? Ignorance of the things about us, and what is taking place around us. (*Émile*, II, p.117)

Childhood is traditionally associated with folk tales, nursery rhymes and moral tales, but Rousseau seems to want to break this link in an attempt to further rationalise childhood. He even recommends the exclusion of children's authors that he has enjoyed reading such as Charles Perrault, remarking that they should be read in adulthood when the moral content of their work can be fully 'comprehended'. The magic of childhood, which is expressed through the childish imagination but also through the cultural transmission of fables and tales, is subjected to Rousseau's relentless rationalism. In doing this however, the imaginative bounds of the child are considerably reduced.

One of the central paradoxes of the Enlightenment is that in order to expand its knowledge of the natural world it had to limit its horizons. Rousseau's thinking is driven by the dialectic of limit and extension. Two forces exist in Enlightenment thinking: first the need to survey the unknown world in order to map it thus allowing for future expansion; second, the need to fence in existing knowledge in order to exploit it as a *useful* resource. These two forces are characterised by Adorno and Horkheimer in the figures of Odysseus and Crusoe: 'Odysseus and Crusoe are both concerned with totality: the former measures whereas the latter produces it'.¹⁷ Interestingly, Rousseau, having refused to allow Émile to read children's stories, describing books as 'the curse of childhood', does make one concession allowing him to read *Robinson Crusoe*. He describes how Émile should identify with Crusoe and how his imagination should be full of 'his castle, his goats, his plantations' (*Émile*, II, p.63). In

¹⁷ Adorno, Theodor W. and Horkheimer, Max, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso 1997), p.62.

Rousseau's thinking man is an island. Alienated from society, and even from the expansive possibilities of his own imagination he defines himself by the limits of his knowledge.

For Rousseau childhood as a zone of consciousness is virgin territory – a limitless expanse waiting to be occupied. But Rousseau's attempts at colonisation cannot result in the occupation of the space of childhood. Indeed his ability to hold sway over Émile is, as has been discussed, the result of his alienation from childhood. But what of young Odysseus-Émile, surely he can gain dominion over his own childhood? No, because his Crusoe-like act of self-possession leaves him on the same side of the fence as his tutor.

Finding Children, Losing Mothers

Rousseau insists that his protégé be an orphan. He does not mean this literally. He is not concerned with whether Émile's parents are living or dead. However, he is insistent that Émile's parents relinquish control over their child allowing Rousseau complete 'authorship' of his fictional creation: 'Émile is an orphan. No matter whether he has father or mother, having under taken their duties I am invested with their rights. He must honour his parents, but he must obey me. That is my first and only condition' (*Émile*, I, p.23). This assertion is strange, as elsewhere Rousseau remarks that the best teacher of a child is his father, and the best nurse is his mother. So in a sense Rousseau could be accused of settling for second best. But one doesn't get the impression that Rousseau really believes that he is settling for second best. Émile is represented at all times as the model

child, at least as good a child as it is possible to 'produce' given the corruptions imposed from without by the demands of the modern world.

Rousseau's insistence that Émile be an orphan is also interesting in relation to his own life. Rousseau notoriously gave up all five of his own children to foundling homes. In *Émile* Rousseau sounds a note of bitter regret, identifying with fathers who have failed in their duty: 'If a man of any natural feeling neglects these sacred duties he will repent it with bitter tears and will never be comforted' (*Émile*, I, p.19). In the light of this we might see *Émile* as the product of guilt, with Rousseau trying to right the wrong of abandoning his own children by 'bringing up' a fictional child of his own. Except that the child is not his own, and he insists upon this. If he had wanted he could have written a novel about the relationship of a father and son. This would have been the ideal vehicle for Rousseau to play at being a father. But what Rousseau wants to do is imagine himself in the role of the tutor of an orphan. For Rousseau, what is seductive about Émile is that he is without parents. More than this, he clearly believes that Émile's parents should feel no guilt, for in handing their child over to a tutor they are ensuring that he receives the best possible education.

Rousseau enacts a benevolent adoption, free of the guilt that was attached to abandoning his children to an orphanage where their future would have been far from secure. Rousseau presents us with the 'happy orphan', a child that feels no ill feelings towards his parents for abandoning him. Moreover he is more than compensated for his loss because he is being educated by the best of all possible tutors, a man who is more than a tutor, but rather a friend for life. In Rousseau's model all the messy feelings of parental guilt, and the child's resentment at having been abandoned are resolved. Mary Jacobus notes another

psychological loose end that Rousseau ties up by creating this scenario.

Rousseau's mother died before he knew her. Jacobus sees Rousseau's abandonment of his own children, and tutoring of a fictional orphan in *Émile* as a response to his own sense of being 'abandoned' by his mother as an infant:

In unburdening himself of his children, Rousseau at a stroke ensured a repetition of his own abandonment by the mother who died at his birth, and put a stop to it. When, therefore, he writes in *Émile* that "women have stopped being mothers" he was complaining about a stoppage that intimately concerned himself. His solution was to get rid of the mother as well as the *enfants trouvés*, leaving the educator in charge.¹⁸

Rousseau's psychological impulse to rid himself of the mother is complicated, because though the tutor can step into the role once occupied by the father, he cannot entirely dispense with 'mothers' (even if the mother in question is not the birth mother) because of their role in feeding. Moreover, though Jacobus is right to suggest that in terms of *Émile*'s upbringing the mother is absent, readers in the eighteenth century tended to emphasise Rousseau's message that mothers should not abandon their children to wet nurses, but should breast feed them themselves. This is not to say that Jacobus' analysis of Rousseau psychological motivation is wrong, but rather that Rousseau's feelings of antipathy for 'mothers' is expressed in contradictory ways. Rousseau's attack on modern motherhood further allows him to project any guilt he feels for abandoning his own children onto 'mothers', who as Mary Jacobus points out, with reference to Winnicott, can never be quite 'good enough'.¹⁹

¹⁸ Mary Jacobus, 'Incorruptible Milk: Breast Feeding and the French Revolution', *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, eds. Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992) p. 58.

¹⁹ Jacobus remarks: '*Émile* suggests that every mother is unnatural – either refusing to nurture her own child, like the woman of society, or choosing to nurture someone else's for money in place of her own, like the peasant wet nurse. No mother can yet be (in Winnicott's phrase) good enough, no milk impervious to corruption. The parasite is endemic to the system.' Ibid, p.60.

In Book One, Rousseau vents his anger at mothers who deliver their newly born children into the hands of rural wet-nurses. In Rousseau's view mothers had failed in their 'first duty' by refusing to nurse their own children (*Émile*, I, p.12). This failure marked them out as bad mothers because it broke the natural bond between a mother and her infant. Even when the child was returned to its birth mother this bond could not be easily reinstated, for during the child's absence maternal feelings continue to wane: 'motherhood becomes a burden; means are found to avoid it' (*Émile* I, p.13).

In the case of wet-nurses Rousseau contended that such a woman could not be a good-mother substitute, because in order to become a wet-nurse she would have had to cut short the weaning period of her own child in order to feed a stranger's baby: 'The woman who nurses another's child in place of her own is a bad mother; how can she be a good nurse?' (*Émile*, p.14). Such a woman, Rousseau insists, would be inclined to neglect a stranger's child, putting in the minimum amount of effort to ensure its well-being. But even if the wet-nurse turns out to be attentive to her charge, and develops a motherly affection for the child, Rousseau is still not happy. A mother who allows her child to develop motherly affection for another woman is an unnatural mother. Moreover the child will itself become confused when he returns home. Who should the child bestow his affections on, his birth mother or the woman who has nursed and looked after him? Rousseau is concerned that a child might develop too strong a bond with its wet-nurse, resulting in psychological trauma when it is forced to part from her. Rousseau describes how attempts to break an infant's bond with its wet-nurse will inevitably result in the child growing up to despise both its wet-nurse and its mother:

To remove this difficulty, children are taught to look down on their nurses, to treat them as mere servants. When their task is completed the child is withdrawn or the nurse is dismissed. Her visits to her foster-child are discouraged by a cold reception. After a few years the child never sees her again. The mother expects to take her place, and to repair by her cruelty the results of her own neglect. But she is greatly mistaken; she is making an ungrateful foster-child, not an affectionate son; she is teaching him ingratitude, and she is preparing him to despise at a later day the mother who bore him, as he now despises his nurse. (*Émile*, p.14)

But where are fathers in all this? Are they not also to be ‘despised’ for sending their children to hired hands? Apparently not. In Rousseau’s view wives are manipulating their husband in order to gain free time away from their babies. Rousseau plays on the husband’s fear of adultery. He addresses husbands and fathers, suggesting that their wives are ‘tricking’ them in order to avoid caring for their children. Moreover, he insinuates that if wives are able to trick their husbands in order to avoid their maternal duties, then they are likely to trick them over their duties as a wife. Free from their infants women have the opportunity to act on their desires:

I have sometimes watched the tricks of young wives who pretend that they wish to nurse their own children. They take care to be dissuaded from this whim. They contrive that husbands, doctors, and especially mothers should intervene. If a husband should let his wife nurse her own baby it would be the ruin of him; they would make him out a murderer who wanted to be rid of her. A prudent husband must sacrifice paternal affection to domestic peace. Fortunately for you there are women in the country districts more continent than your wives. You are still more fortunate if the time thus gained is not intended for another than yourself. (*Émile*, I, p.13)

In reality the wet-nursing business in eighteenth-century France was very different from the scenario that Rousseau presents us with. As Valérie Lastinger points out the wet-nursing business was largely run by men: ‘historical records show that it was the father, rather than the mother, who was the wet nurse’s employer, hiring her, paying her, corresponding with the nurse or her husband.’²⁰

²⁰ Valérie Lastinger, ‘Re-Defining Motherhood: Breast-Feeding and the French Enlightenment’, *Women’s Studies*, vol.25, 1996, p.606.

Lastinger notes that it was male sexual desire that often motivated fathers to send their infants away to be wet-nursed. It was commonly believed that sexual excitement in lactating women would spoil their milk. Thus if a man wanted to have sexual relations with his wife after she had given birth it was in his interest to have his child sent away. Moreover, during the nursing period women's sex drive tended to be lower. Lastinger describes how men put pressure on women to make a choice: 'intense pressure was made on her to "choose" maternal nursing and therefore to practice sexual abstinence. On the other hand, she was also submitted to the direct pressure of her husband, since she shared responsibility in any sin of masturbation or adultery committed by her husband during the abstinence period'.²¹ This adds an interesting twist to Rousseau's 'observations'. If women insisted on nursing their own children they were likely to be blamed for their husbands' sexual indiscretion. But if they sent their children away to wet-nurses, men like Rousseau were quick to suggest that they would commit adultery and were not to be trusted. Women were placed in a no-win situation.

There is further evidence to suggest that women were indeed manipulated by their husbands as well as other family members into giving up their infants to wet nurses. Nancy Senior cites an anecdote recalled by Mme Le Rebourds, who wrote a book, partly inspired by her own experience as a mother, which gave advice on infant feeding. Mme Le Rebourds' book *Avis aux Meres qui veulent nourrir leurs enfants* (1767) encouraged women to breast feed their own children, but rather than heaping vitriol on young mothers as Rousseau does, Mme Le Rebourds recognised the difficulties that young women faced and the

²¹ *ibid*, p. 611.

opposition that existed to breast-feeding within their own family. The anecdote that Senior cites presents a situation that is the exact opposite of the one that Rousseau presents. It is the mother who is being tricked and manipulated by those closest to her:

If one is to believe our author, there was in some cases quite literally a conspiracy to prevent mothers from [nursing their own children]. She [Mme Le Rebours] cites a case where *garde*, husband, and grandmother did not want a new mother to feed her child. They gave the baby cow's milk before bringing it to the mother, then told her that the child's refusal to suck showed that she had no milk. Once, despite the fact that the child had already fed successfully, the midwife told the gullible young woman that she could not nurse her child because her breasts were not of the right shape.²²

Both Rousseau and Mme Le Rebours provide us with anecdotal evidence that we might question the validity of. In any case we might overlook their differences and emphasise the fact that both writers advocated that first time mothers should breast-feed their children. We might absolve Rousseau of his misogyny on the grounds that he had the child's best interests at heart. But such a conclusion would only serve to paper over the cracks, and ignore the driving ideology behind Rousseau's response to mothers and motherhood. Rousseau concedes that his remonstrations are in vein: 'Women have ceased to be mothers, they do not and will not return to their duty' (*Émile*, I, p.15). In the light of this we might ask what exactly was the point of Rousseau's invective against mothers. One answer to this question is that Rousseau's psychological warfare is intended to remove what is left of women's self-confidence, and make them pliable to the manipulation of their husbands and other male authority figures. At one point, after attempting to inspire guilt and self-hatred in mothers Rousseau performs a remarkable rhetorical turn around. Modern urban mothers,

²² Nancy Senior, 'Aspects of Infant Feeding in Eighteenth-Century France'. *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1983, vol. 16, p.376.

Rousseau declares, are just not up to the job of nursing their children. In the light of this their children are better off with wet-nurses after all:

There can be no doubt about a wife's duty, but, considering the contempt in which it is held, it is doubtful whether it is not just as good for the child to be suckled by a stranger. This is a question for the doctor's to settle, and in my opinion they have settled it according to the women's wishes, and for my own part I think it is better that the child should suck the breast of a healthy nurse rather than of a petted mother, if he has any further evil to fear from her who has given him birth. (*Émile*, I, pp.13-14)

It is unavoidable, indeed essential, if Rousseau's project is to succeed, that the infant *Émile* is totally under the control of his tutor Jean-Jacques. As has been said, the child can do without its father, as Jean Jacques can take his place, but the child needs a mother, even if it is somebody else's mother. For Rousseau, such a woman must know her place, she must be subject to the control and surveillance of the child's tutor, and most importantly she must know when to withdraw. The ideal woman for this role is ironically a wet-nurse: a hired servant. What Rousseau does is to reduce all women to the status of wet nurses. In a notable passage in which Rousseau sets out to 'choose' a suitable nurse for *Émile*, it is interesting how the identity of birth mother and wet-nurse merge into one another, and both into that of the servant. It is not important whether the child's nurse is its mother or not, what is important is that the mother or nurse does not contradict Rousseau's advice, and is content to obey her male 'master':

When our life begins our needs begin too. The new-born infant must have a nurse. If his mother will do her duty, so much the better; her instructions will be given her in writing, but this advantage has its drawbacks, it removes the tutor from his charge. But it is to be hoped that the child's own interests, and her respect for the person to whom she is about to confide so precious a treasure, will induce the mother to follow the master's wishes ... (*Émile*, I, p,27)

In addressing mothers, Rousseau has given mixed messages and often contradictory advice. But though many of Rousseau's pronouncements appear to

cancel each other out, one thing that is not cancelled out is the guilt he attempts to instil in young mothers. The combined effect of this guilt, his constant undermining of women's confidence and his questioning of their maternal judgement, is to disorientate young mothers and so make them malleable to the demands placed upon them by their husbands and other 'experts'.²³

Whether the child is breast-fed by its birth mother or a wet-nurse Rousseau insists that it remain in her care for only as long as is strictly necessary, until her duties have been performed. Rousseau insists that once the child is weaned he should pass from the hands of the mother/wet-nurse to the father, or in *Émile*'s case his tutor. Rousseau is anxious to avoid 'outsiders' intervening between him and his charge. As we have seen, earlier in *Émile* Rousseau attacks the practice of wet-nursing on the grounds that if a child does develop 'too' strong a bond with his nurse then he will suffer the trauma of separation when he returns home. In consequence of this Rousseau believes that the child would come to hold both his wet-nurse and mother in contempt later in life. Rousseau, by demanding that a child pass from its mother to its father, is enforcing a similar form of traumatic separation. Moreover, the reason behind this enforced separation, that mothers are simply not good enough to bring up their own children once they are weaned, would surely lead male children to 'despise' their mothers in later life, indeed to treat them as servants whose role is defined by a physiological function rather than their skills as carers.

²³ Nancy Senior argues more generally that the undermining of the confidence particularly of first time mothers by medical experts actually contributed to the growth of the wet nursing business in eighteenth century France: 'I contend that, what ever may have been the various other factors, medical opinion contributed to the wetnursing phenomenon by undermining the confidence of prospective parents, and particularly of young mothers-to-be, in the woman's ability to nurse a child.' Ibid p.375.

In view of this it is not surprising that in the case of Émile Rousseau appears to prefer a wet nurse, and takes great care in describing how to choose the best one. As Valerie Fildes points out the characteristics that are associated with the ideal wet nurse had changed very little since antiquity.²⁴ Rousseau realises that he is following conventional wisdom in asking for a caring, hygiene-conscious, healthy woman, docile in character (for ‘violence of the passion ...may spoil the milk’), and moderate in her habits (*Émile*, I, p.28). He also requires a woman who has only recently become a nurse. This is interesting as earlier Rousseau had lambasted wet-nurses for neglecting their own children in favour of a stranger’s child. In the eighteenth century it was uncommon for a woman to take up a post as a wet-nurse before she had nursed her own child for up to six months. Surely then by demanding that his nurse be a woman who has only recently given birth Rousseau becomes the agent of the very neglect he has criticised. It seems that Rousseau is prepared to be a hypocrite in order to ensure that Émile receives only the very best care during his infancy.

Mary Jacobus rightly asserts that Rousseau’s overriding concern is not with the person of the wet-nurse, but with the quality of her milk: ‘Émile’s wet-nurse is reduced to the sum of her milk, viewed as the product of a carefully regulated system of biological, temperamental, moral, and dietary components.’²⁵ Jacobus goes on to wittily connect Rousseau’s insistence that his wet-nurse follow a largely vegetarian diet to the image of a cow being put out to pasture:

Rousseau’s recipe for purifying both milk and morals is pastoralization. Ideally, he says, the wet-nurse should be a healthy peasant woman of good character, living in the country, and (this is important) eating a largely vegetarian diet: ‘The milk of herbivorous females is sweeter and healthier than that of carnivores. Formed of a substance homogenous with its own, it preserves its nature better and becomes less

²⁴ For a description of these characteristics see Valerie Fildes, *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Blackwell 1988), p.20.

²⁵ Mary Jacobus, ‘Incorruptible Milk: Breast-Feeding and the French Revolution’, p.59.

subject to putrefaction'. Meat eating on the part of the wet-nurse leads to bad morals as well as (so Rousseau believes) intestinal parasites in infants. Since corruption begins at the breast, the only safeguard against moral infection or infestation by worms is to put women out to grass.²⁶

Mothers in *Émile* are reduced to the status of milk cows, with Rousseau's language often coming close to resembling that of the cattle breeder going to market to purchase the right breed. He favours rural peasant women over urban upper class women, trusting in the superior quality of their milk yield. It is not unusual in the history of wet-nursing for women from particular locations to be favoured for the quality of their milk. Valerie Fildes remarks with reference to Plutarch how in the classical period Spartan women appear to have been favoured. In Renaissance Florence the women of Casentino were sought after, while later in nineteenth-century Paris it was the women of Morvan.²⁷ Rousseau may not share the racial determinism that favoured women from particular regions, but it is comparable to his environmental determinism, which certainly does apply here. Moreover, despite attacking wet-nurses Rousseau does appear to view women as marketable commodities. Rousseau's search for a suitable nurse can be related to an economic history that stretches back at least to Roman times when nurses and their 'customers' did business beside specially designated columns in the Roman Forum known as *lactaria*.²⁸

A hired woman is obliged to obey the commands of her employer, and this relationship seems to suit Rousseau. As Jacobus points out by robbing women of their agency and of the exercising of their reason they are reduced to the status of dumb animals. Rousseau remarks: 'Do not argue with the nurses; give your orders, see them carried out' (*Émile*, I, p.32). Rousseau treatment of wet-nurses

²⁶ Ibid, p.59.

²⁷ Valerie Fildes, *Wet Nursing*, p.17.

²⁸ Ibid, p.18.

has parallels with his advice on disciplining young children: 'I should no more expect judgement in a ten-year old child than I should expect him to be five feet high' (*Émile*, I, p.63). Clearly for Rousseau women and small children are not to be reasoned with.

Another comparison can be drawn between the 'selection process' that Rousseau employs to choose an orphan, and the selection process he employs to select a suitable wet-nurse. His orphan, like his wet-nurse, must be physically fit and healthy. Moreover after being nursed *Émile* is, to use Jacobus' phrase, 'put out to grass', spending much of his childhood roaming the countryside. But whereas *Émile* in later life will be allowed to develop a personality (albeit one shaped by his tutor), the mother or wet nurse is doomed to anonymity. Her contribution to her nursling is restricted to the earliest stage of development, when the child's personality has not yet fully emerged. Thus in order that Rousseau can find his orphan, his *enfant trouvé*, the 'mother' must be lost, her contribution all but erased from the child's memory, as she is banished before her nursling can be fully conscious of her as a person in her own right. The mother, not the child, is abandoned. She must endure the psychological trauma of not knowing her child as he grows up; a trauma that is perhaps as devastating as the experience of being orphaned.

During his childhood and youth *Émile* has the bare minimum of contact with the female sex. As we have seen, and as we shall go on to explore in Chapter Two, Rousseau had little respect for modern women, and did not want his educational programme contaminated by their presence. But like the God of the Old Testament he also believes that 'it is not good that man should be alone' and is determined to provide *Émile* with 'his promised helpmeet' (*Émile*, p.384).

Unbeknown to Émile Jean-Jacques has a young woman in mind, a woman whose education has conformed to his exacting standards, and so has none of the 'blemishes' of modern womankind. Émile's tutor plays matchmaker to these two young people, mediating between the two lovers, and is held in high esteem by both. Rousseau's pleasure in writing this romance involves both his centrality and marginality to the emerging relationship. The two youngsters, still wary of each other, use Jean-Jacques as the conduit for their love. He is gratified to hear his name mentioned in conversation between Émile and Sophy: 'When I consider that the tender love of my young friend has brought my name so prominently into his first conversation with his lady-love, I enjoy the reward of all my trouble; his affection is a significant recompense' (*Émile*, V p.460). One might assume that when the couple are married then Jean-Jacques' role would finally be at an end, but not so, for Émile on discovering a few months later that his wife is pregnant runs to his trusty tutor, full of anxiety, to enlist his help on child-rearing: 'Advise and control us; we shall be easily led, as long as I live I shall need you. I need you more than ever now that I am taking up the duties of manhood. You have done your own duty; teach me to follow your example, while you enjoy your well-earned leisure' (*Émile*, V, p.533). Jean-Jacques is now indispensable to his young pupil, whose psychological dependence on his tutor is now complete. But the reality of Rousseau's life is that he did not do his duty to his children. *Émile* is an act of psychic disavowal, with Rousseau enacting a fantasy in which he is rewarded for the time and effort he has spent on his fictional child. He has been judged a good father, albeit by his fictional son rather than his actual children. Thus, through his writing, and at least in his own eyes, it would appear Rousseau has been redeemed. The supreme irony of *Émile* is that at the close of the book it

is Rousseau who is adopted by the family he has brought into existence. So, though mothers are marginalized and abandoned, Rousseau has at last been claimed – *père trouvé!*

Chapter Two

When I Came to Man's Estate: Émile's Entrance into Adulthood

Time Demarcation and the Imposition of the Distinction Between Work and Play

In the first two books of *Émile*, Rousseau's pupil learns to adapt to *where he is*, but he has not yet gained an awareness of *where he is going* in the sense of who he is to become. Émile has a limited spatial awareness that allows him to orientate himself to particular situations, but he has not yet developed long-term objectives that would allow him to develop a sense of a destination (destination as destiny). Émile is trapped in the immediate, having only a limited memory of the past. This memory consists of a sensory map of his physical experiences, a map that affords him an even more limited future horizon. It is Émile's entrance into the 'age of reason', at about the age of 12 or 13 that allows him to plot a path into the future. He develops *foresight*, allowing him to develop a sense of purpose. At this point Rousseau insists that a distinction be drawn between work and play, and so on entering adulthood temporal distinctions are imposed on the value of time and the difference between work and relaxation. The development of *foresight* presents new dangers for Rousseau. His pupil is now presented with choices as to how he will occupy his time, and these choices involve value judgments that have moral implications:

As soon as he has sufficient self-knowledge to understand what constitutes his well-being, as soon as he can grasp such far-reaching relations as to judge what is good for him and what is not, then he is able to discern the difference between work and play, and to consider the latter merely as relaxation. The objects of real utility may be introduced into his studies and may lead him to more prolonged attention than he gave to his games. The ever-recurring law of necessity soon teaches a man to do what he does not like, so as to avert evils which he would

dislike still more. Such is the use of foresight, and this foresight, well or ill used, is the source of all the wisdom or the wretchedness of mankind. (*Émile*, III, p.168)

Rousseau's language here chimes in with the rhetoric associated with the Protestant work ethic, with Rousseau fearing the moral consequences of idle hands. However, it is important to note that Rousseau in earlier chapters is set against the imposition of a work ethic thus allowing *Émile* to develop at his own pace and emphasising the importance of play to childhood development. Indeed, before the age of reason the child is unable to draw a distinction between work and play: 'Work or play are all one to him, his games are his work; he knows no difference. He brings to everything the cheerfulness of interest, the charm of freedom ...' (*Émile*, II, p.150). However once he is able to discern the distinction between work and play he is required to *divide his time* between work and leisure and to abandon 'play' as a pass-time.

Once *Émile* has reached the age of reason Rousseau sees fit to keep him busy by introducing him to a range of trades before finally specialising in the trade of carpentry. Now it might seem odd, particularly as *Émile* has inherited wealth, for Rousseau to choose to train him in a trade that is associated with the artisan class. However, Rousseau, throughout *Émile*, is consistently opposed to what might be described as the emergence of a 'new economy' characterised by urban upper class commodity consumption. Rousseau sees the emergence of this economy as a symptom of the degeneration of European civilisation. Like other Enlightenment thinkers, and particularly later thinkers such as Moses Mendelssohn and Emanuel Kant²⁹, Rousseau conceives of civilisation as having a

²⁹ See Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' and, Moses Mendelssohn 'On the Question: What is Enlightenment?' in *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkeley: University of California Press 1996).

life span that mirrors that of the human subject. Rousseau was convinced that European civilisation was on the brink of collapse and revolution. He comments in Book Three: ‘crisis is approaching and we are on the edge of a revolution’. He expands on this point in a footnote: ‘In my opinion it is impossible that the great kingdoms of Europe should last much longer. Each of them has had its period of splendour, after which it must inevitably decline’ (*Émile*, III. p.188). In the light of his view that a revolution was just around the corner Rousseau’s choice of the trade of carpenter is understandable, in fact it makes sound economic sense. Rousseau is giving his pupil a transferable skill as part of a contingency plan in the event of a revolutionary transformation of society.

Rousseau laments the emergence of commodity culture and is particularly scornful of those trades that supply the markets with luxury goods such as ‘goldsmiths, engravers, gilders, embroiders’ who he considers to be ‘lazy people’ playing ‘quite useless games’ (*Émile*, III. p.180). In a telling passage Rousseau focuses his criticism on the makers of fine clocks,³⁰ comparing the way a clock keeps time to the way a child *lives* it: ‘The happy child enjoys Time without being a slave to it; he uses it, but he does not know its value. The freedom from passion which makes everyday alike to him, makes any means of measuring time unnecessary’ (*Émile*, III, p.180). The clock can be seen as symbolic of the new economy. Increasingly the clock functioned as a means of regulating and policing industrial labour in order to enforce a fixed quantifiable value on the way people used their time. It made it possible for individuals to synchronise with the wider operations of the capitalist system. The clock was also a commodity in itself, an attractive possession that allowed its wealthy owner a

³⁰ It is worthy of note that Rousseau’s father was a clockmaker from Geneva.

certain amount of autonomy over his own time so that he might manage it better. This autonomy can be seen as a form of self-possession – *having the time* - but this can only happen because of increased standardisation within the wider market place. Rousseau sees the temporal regulation offered by ‘clock time’ as being unnatural as it involves a form of time-consciousness that is at odds with lived-time (the temporal experience of living). Of course lived-time is not without its parameters, the need for rest, the need for physical action and even the experience of hunger and its satiation act as a means of marking time. But the symbol of the clock stands for the objectification of time. We can only lose time by possessing it in this objectified form, because the acquisition of time creates an outside that we cannot inhabit. Our consciousness of the passage of time, our very knowledge of time, involves both our alienation from and our absolute subjection to an external universal category that measures all aspects of life. For Rousseau the time of childhood appears to have offered a type of temporal resistance to the historical epoch that he was living in. If children are not conscious of the passage of time then time cannot be said to be external to them. Children, by standing outside objectified time, but by not being aware that they are standing outside objectified time, embody temporality without *knowing* it, for to know it is to lose it.

There are many contradictions in Rousseau’s thinking on this subject. For example, he glorifies the temporality of childhood as playful and free, but then berates those adults who ‘misuse’ their time as ‘lazy game players’, a term he would never apply to a child. He attacks the standardisation of time, but embraces the Protestant work ethic that was to so comprehensively regulate labour time in the coming century commenting: ‘Man in society is bound to

work; rich or poor, weak or strong, every idler is a thief.’ (*Émile*, III, p.189). In order to understand the contradictions in Rousseau’s thinking we need to look in greater depth at his reaction to the economic and historical transitions occurring at the time he was writing. In the next section we will examine Rousseau’s response to some of these transitions in order to show how historical changes to the material conditions of existence and their impact upon culture can be related to the emergence of a distinctly modern form of subjectivity. This new form of subjectivity is ‘feminised’ by Rousseau and can be linked to commodity culture and the ‘new economy’.

Consuming Subjects

In Book Three of *Émile* Rousseau introduces his pupil to economic practices both local and global, and elaborates upon some of their social impacts. Rousseau makes a sustained attack on the urban upper class, the leisured class and aristocracy attacking their consumption as far in excess of their labour. To use Marxist terminology, which addresses itself quite neatly to Rousseau’s economic thinking, those he takes exception to are the people who live off the products arising from the surplus labour of others. To illustrate his point Rousseau takes Émile to two separate social occasions, the first at a rich man’s house and the second at the home of a peasant. At the meal at the rich man’s house, amidst all the luxury and splendour, Rousseau asks Émile: ‘How many hands do you suppose the things on this table passed through before they got here?’. He then goes on to reveal to his pupil some of the consequences of

European colonial expansion and mercantile capitalism that allow the rich to live such extravagant lives:

[W]hat will he think of luxury when he finds that every quarter of the globe has been ransacked, that some 2,000,000 men have laboured for years, that many lives have perhaps been sacrificed, and all to furnish him with fine clothes to be worn at midday and laid by in the wardrobe at night. (*Émile*, III, p.184)

Rousseau then takes his pupil to a meal at a local miller's house where the food they have prepared and even the clothes they are wearing are the products of their own labour. Rousseau contrasts the local with the global describing the miller's world as 'bounded by the nearest mill and the next market' (*Émile*, III, p.184). The conclusion he wants his pupil to reach is a simple one: that distinctions of wealth are arbitrary, and that the 'rich man's stomach is no larger than the poor man's' (*Émile*, III, 184).

The totalising and universalising tendency of the Enlightenment has already been discussed. But the recognition of the basic material requirements of all humanity, irrespective of an individual's station or rank, is an element of Enlightenment thinking that should be redeemed. Rousseau's universalism in this instant is grounded in identification. Rousseau does not have his pupil pity the poor from a position of superiority, but because he may one day occupy their social position himself: 'Make him thoroughly aware of the fact that the fate of these unhappy persons may one day be his own, that his feet are standing on the edge of the abyss, into which he may be plunged at any moment by a thousand unexpected irresistible misfortunes' (*Émile*, III, p.222). However, Rousseau's materialism fails to take account of cultural differences. Rousseau would have us love all of humanity, but he would also have us teach our children to be unaware of their own distinctness as members of localised classes or cultural

groups: ‘teach your pupil to love all men. even those who fail to appreciate him; act in such a way that he is not a member of any class, but takes his place in all’ (*Émile*, III, p.224). Rousseau’s universalism would neutralise any political action that attempted to redress the balance between rich and poor that arose from the experiences of a particular oppressed group. In contrast to localised class-consciousness, Rousseau’s universalism is founded on a trans-historical and trans-cultural assumption founded on species recognition. Nevertheless, his methodology has produced a universal category that can be applied to humanity in general and is worth retaining.

But it is when Rousseau moves from the general to the particular that problems arise. He cannot, for example, see the culturally diverse space of the modern metropolis of Paris as anything other than a manifestation of humanity’s corruption in its totality. As we have seen Rousseau advocates bringing children up in relative isolation in the countryside, advising that children be taken away ‘from the vile morals of the town, whose gilded surface makes them seductive and contagious to [them]’ (*Émile*, II, p.70). The attractions of the city act upon children like a disease infecting their minds. But it is not just children who are attracted to these ‘gilded surfaces’, as women are also described as being particularly susceptible, abandoning their duties as wives and mothers in order to pursue ‘the pleasures of the town’ (*Émile*, I, p.12). Women are singled out for their conspicuous consumption and their ‘slavish’ devotion to fashion. For Rousseau the space of modern Paris is both a feminine space and a feminising space. For example, the makers of luxury goods - embroiders, goldsmiths, jewellers – are all seen as purveyors of ‘effeminate’ trades; trades that cater to the whims and desires of the ultimate consumers - women. These more delicate

‘effeminate’ trades are contrasted with manly trades involving physical labour. In one of Rousseau’s ‘if I ruled the world’ diatribes he takes his ideas on the gender division of labour to an extreme, threatening with castration those men who are only fit for ‘feminine’ modes of employment:

If I were King I would only allow needlework and dressmaking to be done by women and cripples... The weak, feeble, timid man is condemned by nature to a sedentary life, he is fit to live among women or in their fashion. Let him adopt one of their trades if he likes; and if there must be eunuchs let them take those men who dishonour their sex by adopting trades unworthy of it. Their choice proclaims a blunder on the part of nature; correct it one way or the other, you will do no harm. (Émile, III, p.194)

The threat of castration that Rousseau would impose on ‘effeminate’ men is clearly an expression of his own sense of emasculation when confronted with the feminising space of the city. Rousseau feels helpless before the urban environment, utterly unable to establish any autonomy as a cultural agent or to impose his pedagogic structures on children whose minds are ‘infected’ by outside agents. Indeed, we might infer that he feels more than just sympathy for the city children whom he describes as being abandoned to the pleasure seeking inclinations of urban women, but rather, that he identifies with them.

In contrast, urban upper class women often found the experience of city life to be liberating, affording them a new role as both consumers and agents of urban culture.³¹ As Jennifer Jones points out, writing on the growth of ‘fashion’ (*la mode*) in the Enlightenment, women were seen as helping to produce the spectacle of city life through personal display: this afforded them a means of self-presentation. However, rather than the idea of an autonomous self, self-

³¹ See Sylvana Tomaselli, ‘The Enlightenment Debate on Women’, *History Workshop Journal*, vol.20, 1985, pp.101-124. Tomaselli stresses how many Enlightenment thinkers viewed women as a civilising force in relation to culture. She comments: ‘Women ... not only benefited from culture. They were its agents. They brought it about, kindled it and nurtured its advancement’ (p.121).

contained and self-producing, the cultural performance of women was both mediated by and a reflection of a wider urban theatre. As Jones remarks, the Enlightenment drew certain inferences from this concerning female psychology:

During the eighteenth century pervasive beliefs concerning women's ability to seize and quickly absorb the visual world around them ...naturalise[d] a new role for them as 'consumers' ... Women's minds and sensory apparatus made them ideally suited to consume: their passivity rendered female consumers particularly vulnerable to being captured through sensual delight by agreeable and frivolous objects.³²

Rousseau echoes this view of female psychology in his speculations on female education in Book Five of *Émile*. Rousseau comments: 'Even the tiniest little girls love finery; they are not content to be pretty, they must be admired; their little airs and graces show that their heads are full of this idea'. (*Émile*, V, p.392). The female self has a far greater mobility than the male self. In terms of perspective it is radically displaced perceiving it self almost entirely from the position of the other. This contrasts with *Émile*'s conception of self as an infant. *Émile* has little or no conception of the human other as anything more than 'not-self'. The strong parallels between Rousseau's conception of the female subject and modern conceptions of the self cannot be missed. For example, we might draw a link between Rousseau's conception of the self and Freud's conception of self-love in 'On Narcissism'. However, this link is not straight forward and needs some elaboration.

Freud begins 'On Narcissism' with a definition taken from the work of Paul Nackes where narcissism is described as: 'the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is ordinarily

³² Jennifer M. Jones, 'Repackaging Rousseau: Femininity and Fashion in Old Regime France', *French Historical Studies*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1994, p.963.

treated'.³³ In psychoanalytical terms this form of self-love involves the withdrawal of libidinal impulses from objects in the external world and their redirection towards the subjects own ego as a love-object. In Freudian theory the ego is not present at birth but emerges as part of a developmental process of subject formation. If we compare this to Rousseau, in *Émile's* infancy, self and environment are blurred to such an extent that he cannot be said to have a concept of self that he could cathect as being distinct from his physical environment; the process of objectification that will allow for the conceptual split between subject and object is not yet complete. Similarly in Freud the ego-libido and object-libido are not present in earliest childhood. However what is present from the outset is auto-erotism. Freud suggests in 'On Narcissism' that it is through the interaction over time of the infant with its own body and between the infant and its adult carer that enables the child to conceive of itself as being in possession of a totalised unitary body – its self. The ego-libido has its foundation in auto-erotism. The object-libido can be linked to the intervention of an adult carer, with the mother being the most likely candidate for the first love-object of both boys and girls. In contrast, Rousseau has *Émile* grow up in almost total isolation from women, but for a paid wet-nurse who is discharged on serving her function. In Freudian terms it would be unlikely that *Émile* would make the libidinal transference from auto-erotism to a heterosexual love object. He would then be inclined towards narcissism which Freud associates with homosexuality: 'We have discovered, especially clearly in people whose libidinal development has suffered some disturbance such as perverts and homosexuals, that in their later choice of love-object they have taken as a model not their

³³ Sigmund Freud, 'On Narcissism' *The Penguin Freud Library*, vol. 2, ed. James Strachey, (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1991), p.65.

mother but their own selves'.³⁴ However, the staunchly homophobic Rousseau takes a very different view. He believes that too much contact with women results in male children becoming effeminate as they take on female manners and behaviour. Gender here is performative in nature and constructed through imitation. Now I do not intend to take sides between Freud and Rousseau as regards the construction of homosexual identity as I consider both positions to be flawed. Rather, I want to stress the way that gender and sexuality is being deployed by both as an ideological tool to address self-reflexivity, and the way that self-reflexivity is feminised and positioned as antithetical to masculinity.

Freud and Rousseau both associate women with narcissism. Freud associates the strongest manifestation of female narcissism with the onset of puberty. He suggests that it is most likely to occur in beautiful women: 'Women, especially if they grow up with good looks, develop a certain self-contentment which compensates them for the social restriction that are imposed upon them in their choice of object [namely the restriction against choosing a love object of the same sex]. Strictly speaking, it is only themselves that such women love with an intensity comparable to that of the man's love for them'.³⁵ In Rousseau what we might identify as narcissism occurs in girls long before puberty. Rousseau's description of the little girls love of 'mirrors jewellery, finery, and especially dolls' can all be linked to the emergence of a *self-conscious* form of subjectivity where the internalised self is a projection of an imaginary outside – the self as object. This can be most forcibly illustrated by the example Rousseau gives of the love of a girl for her doll, which he makes clear is a form of self-love. This

³⁴ Freud, 'On Narcissism', p.81.

³⁵ Freud, 'On Narcissism', p.82.

self-love begins a developmental process of internalisation where the girl eventually becomes her doll:

She is dressing her doll, not herself,' you will say. Just so; she sees her doll, she cannot see herself; she cannot do anything for herself, she has neither the training, nor the talent, nor the strength; as yet she herself is nothing, she is engrossed in her doll and all her coquetry is devoted to it. This will not always be so; in due time she will be her own doll. (*Émile*, V, p.396)

What we see here is the emergence of a distinctly modern subjectivity, but what is important is that it takes the form of a woman and is intimately related to the emergence of capitalism, commodity culture and urban space. In contrast, *Émile*'s subjectivity is rooted in an earlier historical epoch, where the self inhabited the wider landscape of the natural world. Rousseau is clearly disturbed by the emergence of this 'modern woman', though he is also impressed by her power. What he proposes then is that this power be harnessed so that it might serve the purpose of men. In order to do this he must contain it by confining it to the domestic sphere.

Female Domesticity, the Ideological Significance of the Home, and the Importance of Private Property

Society is so general and so mixed there is no place left for retirement, and even in the home we live in public. We live in company till we have no family, and we scarcely know our own relations: we see them as strangers; and the simplicity of home life disappears together with the sweet familiarity which was its charm. In this way do we draw with our mother's milk a taste for the pleasures of the age and the maxims by which it is controlled. (*Émile*, V, p.421)

Rousseau points the accusing finger at women for a whole range of societal ills: population decline; the crisis of the family as a result of female inconstancy and lack of maternal care; the sexual corruption of men, particularly

young men ‘dragged’ into sexual vice by urban women and of course the emasculation of men by women in the big cities. However, it is also women who hold out the potential of redeeming society from the horrors of the age. If only women would change their ways, Rousseau laments, then civilisation might be saved: ‘Would you restore all men to their primal duties, begin with the mothers; the results will surprise you. Every evil follows in the train of this first sin; the whole moral order is disturbed, nature is quenched in every breast, the home becomes gloomy, the spectacle of a young family no longer stirs the husband’s love and the stranger’s reverence.’ (*Émile*, I, p.15) But what if women will not change their ways? Then Rousseau proposes a system of education that will assure their compliance with the general ‘good’.

In Rousseau’s programme, women are not just to be taught to be obedient to men, but to have such a knowledge of the men in their particular family that they can anticipate their wants and needs and so embody their desires. They are to be educated to have a sense of self that is entirely relative to male subjectivity: ‘A woman’s education must ... be planned in relation to man. To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time, and this is what she should be taught when young (*Émile*, V, p.393). Rousseau insists that if women are to be the life-time companion of men, accompanying men from cradle to grave as loyal daughters, wives and mothers, then they must be obedient to men whether they be their intellectual inferiors or superiors, kind or cruel, just or unjust: ‘[F]ormed to obey a creature so imperfect as man, a creature often vicious and always faulty, she should learn to submit to injustice and to suffer the wrongs inflicted on her by

her husband without complaint' (*Émile*, V, p.399). Rousseau's education of women would bring them up to be at best men's servants and at worst their slaves.

Rousseau's educational programme attempts to domesticate women and transform them into good housekeepers. Sophy, whom Émile will marry, represents the ideal of the good housekeeper. She has been trained in domestic economy from an early age by her mother, and has by her adolescence virtually taken over the everyday running of the household in the hope that 'by managing her father's house' she will be better prepared 'to manage her own' (*Émile*, V, p.428). Sophy has been trained in needlework, keeping household accounts, purchasing and preparing food and the importance of personal and domestic cleanliness. Rousseau puts much stress on Sophy's obsessional cleanliness, describing it as a positive 'defect': '[S]he required such absolute cleanliness in her person, clothing, room, work, and toilet, that use has become habit, till it absorbs one half of her time and controls the other; so that she thinks less of how to do a thing than of how to do it without getting dirty' (*Émile*, V, p.428). Sophy appears to be suffering from what we might now regard as an obsessive compulsive disorder, but it is a neurosis that arises from her upbringing and most importantly it addresses one of Rousseau's own phobias – dirty women: 'Nothing could be more revolting than a dirty woman, and a husband who tires of her is not to blame' (*Émile*, V, p.428). It would appear that Rousseau would have young girls internalise the practices of domestic economy to the extent that they manifest as symptoms of a psychic disorder.

We have stressed the importance of Rousseau's environmental determinism to Émile's education, and Rousseau's strong behaviourist instincts.

The same logic can be seen to apply to the education of girls, but with the hope of achieving a very different outcome. Thus rather than being released into the open country young girls find themselves in a domestic environment, and set about adapting to it. As in the case of young males, the distinction between self and environment appears to blur, but this time the girl is confined to a much more restricted space. In time she internalises this space; she is domesticated. Rousseau constantly stresses the importance of habitual restraint and the need to constantly police female children in order to make sure they act in accordance with propriety. She is made constantly aware of the *effect* she will have on others by being made to consider whether her behaviour is pleasing or not. Thus Rousseau would have her acutely socially aware, self-conscious to the point of obsession.

Rousseau admires women's social agility in so far as it serves his purpose. Paradoxically, women in Rousseau's view, though submissive to men, are ideally suited to managing them through subtle manipulation. Women's power is something to be harnessed, contained and properly channelled. She may be subordinate to her male master, but she is indispensable to him as an adviser and confidant:

Woman's reign is a reign of gentleness, tact, and kindness; her commands are caresses, her threats are tears. She should reign in the home as a minister reigns in the state, by contriving to be ordered to do what she wants. In this sense, I grant you, that the best managed homes are those where the wife has most power. But when she despises the voice of her head, when she desires to usurp his rights and take the command upon herself, this inversion of the proper order of things leads to misery, scandal, and dishonour. (*Émile*, V, p.444).

Women can be seen as men's other half not just in terms of their marital status but also in psychic terms. They are the grasping, emotional, sensual, desiring self that Rousseau would have his model man disavow. But they are

also intelligent, socially astute and culturally engaged individuals. This is in marked contrast to Émile whose earlier education involves his profound social and cultural isolation. Women then offer a centre around which the alienated male subject can orbit. But if women move outside the home (for example into the space of the city) and start to become commanders of men rather than just their companions and advisers, then the order of things is unbalanced.

As commentators such as Mary Wollstonecraft have pointed out Rousseau's insistence that little girls experience restraint and submission in childhood is in direct contradiction to his educational precepts as applied to Émile, where freedom from restraint is a key aspect of his pedagogical approach. The unfairness of this is further highlighted by the fact that Rousseau acknowledges that up to puberty there is little to distinguish boys and girls (*Émile*, V, p.206). However, what is even more difficult to account for is that when Rousseau does talk of the subtle differences between little boys and girls, it is often little girls who come out on top. For example new-born girls are described as having an awareness and alertness that new-born boys lack: 'I would have you examine girls, little girls, newly-born so to speak; compare them with boys of the same age, and I am greatly mistaken if you do not find the little boys heavy, silly, and foolish, in comparison' (*Émile*, V, p.400). In many ways little girls are more like *real* children than boys: 'they carry everything to extremes, and they devote themselves to their games with an enthusiasm even greater than boys' (*Émile*, V, p.399). Certainly Rousseau's programme for female education would stifle the development of young girls and prevent them from reaching their full potential, but one of the reasons for this may well be Rousseau's fear not that girls if allowed to develop 'naturally' would grow to be

men's equal, but rather that in certain respects they might grow to be their superiors.

Girls also outstrip boys in their language development: 'Women have ready tongues; they talk earlier, more easily, and more pleasantly than men' (*Émile*, V, p.405). Rousseau goes on to deride the content of women's conversation as often little more than inane prattle, but he does recognise its social function. Thus he would have little girls brought up to be constantly conscious of the impact their conversation is having on others. This contrasts with boys whose conversation is limited by the extent of their knowledge, and whose utterances should be restricted to what is strictly useful: 'You should not check a girl's prattle like a boy's by the harsh question, 'What is the use of that?' but by another question at least as difficult to answer, 'What effect will that have?'' (*Émile*, V, p.406). Little girls are made acutely aware that language takes place within a discursive space, and that their position within this space is determined *only* in relation to the effect that their speech has on others. Thus rather than following her own line of conversation she *amplifies* the conversation of others. Her role as speaker and listener collapse into one another, she is the space in which she speaks; the gap between other people's conversations. The tragedy of all this, of course, is that language as a means of self-expression is denied her. Her language skills, something she has a particular aptitude for, are put at the service of others; she hosts other people's conversations.

Among women's 'positive' attributes Rousseau includes their natural wit, cunning and ingenuity. Women use these attributes to manipulate men and get what they want. Of course, in the context of the eighteenth century these stereotypes were not unique to Rousseau. But what is of note is how they are

applied to female children. The child we are presented with is far more recognisable as *being a child* than her male counterpart. For example, Rousseau tells the story of a little girl who, forbidden to ask for food to be passed to her whilst at table, contrives to taste a dish that is out of her reach. Addressing her dining companions she lists all the dishes she has tasted, theatrically omitting the one beyond her reach. When she is asked whether she has had any of the dish she failed to mention she replies ‘softly’ and ‘with downcast eyes’, ‘Oh no’, and is allowed to have a taste of it (*Émile*, V, p.400). This anecdote may strike a cord with parents today, as it reveals how children manipulate adults in order to get what they want. However, the important point is that such behaviour would be unacceptable if displayed by Émile. Émile’s thoughts, feelings and motivations must be transparent so that his tutor can read him like an open book. In contrast little girls do not reveal everything to their adult carers: ‘for they are flatterers and deceitful and soon learn to conceal their thoughts’ (*Émile*, V, p.398). Rousseau’s derogatory description of females as capable of dissembling conforms to Christian and literary representations of women as manipulative temptresses. But beyond his misogyny the idea that women, even as children, have an interior existence that does not necessarily conform to their outward appearance, or public displays of self, means that the model of female selfhood that Rousseau presents us with conforms far more to modern concepts of subjectivity than does the rather two-dimensional Émile. Moreover, Rousseau is not against girls using their ‘inner’ resources, very occasionally, in order to get their own way: ‘I should not be sorry to see her allowed occasionally to exercise a little ingenuity, not to escape punishment for her disobedience, but to evade the necessity for obedience’ (*Émile*, V, p.400). Thus so long as they play by the

rules, then, girls can achieve a very limited form of *inner* freedom that is denied to boys. It is worthy of note that these feminine skills whereby you achieve set outcomes by planning ahead, and manipulate others so that they comply with your wishes, are indispensable skills for a Rousseauian tutor. One suspects that Rousseau had more in common with his archetypal little girl than he was prepared to admit to himself. Indeed Rousseau's little girl with her inner life and secret thoughts and feelings may remind us, as readers, of ourselves as children.

This incredibly self-conscious being, creative and socially astute, has her potential stifled, her powers redirected so that she might better serve her future husband. She is clearly capable of developing an inner life, that would allow her self-knowledge, but her fate is to be the mirror of the men in her life:

[T]herefore she must have a thorough knowledge of man's mind; not an abstract knowledge of the mind of man in general, but the mind of those men who are about her, the mind of those men who have authority over her, either by law or custom. She must learn to divine their feelings from speech and action, look and gesture. By her own speech and action, look and gesture, she must be able to inspire them with the feelings she desires without seeming to have any such purpose. (*Émile*, V, p.419)

Men's movements, thoughts, feelings, the social significance of which they are only semi-conscious of, are brought to light through the presence of the female other. She creates a specular space that *recognises* him and gestures back. In this ontological theatre the woman must be both actress and director. The secret of her craft is to keep her audience, who also happens to be her leading man, absorbed in the theatrical spectacle she has created. In order to achieve this it is imperative that 'he' does not experiencing it as spectacle.

Women are confined in order that the male can define himself. Safe within the home, they act as a vital co-ordinate allowing for self-orientation, without which the male subject would be hopelessly lost. Women and the

domestic sphere offer men a haven, a place to escape from the uncertainty and constant change that characterise modern life. Some historians, most notably Joan Landes, have described how Rousseau emphasises a gender split between the private and public spheres, with Rousseau banishing women to the home and thus leaving the public space of the city free for the debate and commerce of men³⁶. However, this analysis fails to highlight Rousseau's profound ambivalence towards the modern metropolis in general, not just in relation to upper class women. In *Émile* Rousseau has his pupil visit the city, but only in order that he might realise what a depraved and corrupt place it is. Of course this is paradoxical, as Rousseau claims that he is educating the model citizen, and he defines a citizen as the inhabitant of a city, but Rousseau's ideal city is a mythical city; its a dream inspired by the classical cities of Greece and Rome. In terms of the Enlightenment project, it is a city that has not yet been built. His horror at the modern age results in his advocating a return to the land. Women may lead the retreat from urban to rural, but it is in order that men may follow.

Rousseau advocates a return to patriarchal rural life 'the earliest life of man, the most peaceful, the most natural, and the most attractive to the uncorrupted heart' (*Émile*, V, p.525). He sees cities such as Paris as sapping the life out of the countryside, both economically and culturally: 'It is the great towns which exhaust the state and are the cause of its weakness; the wealth which they produce is a sham wealth ...I believe that Paris is fed by the provinces in more senses than one, and that the greater part of their revenues is poured into that town and stays there ... France would be much more powerful if Paris were destroyed' (*Émile*, V, p.519). Rousseau's call for the destruction of

³⁶ See Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), particularly Chapter Three.

Paris could not be starker. However, faced with the reality of Paris' growing economic significance as it sucks in 'capital' from the provinces, overseas trade and the colonies, he advocated instead an entrenchment in localised social and economic practices that take place within the context of rural tradition.

Rousseau can be seen to have an ideological affinity with a particular section of the bourgeoisie who felt ambivalent towards the pace of change resulting from capitalism's economic expansion. This is contradictory, as the bourgeoisie appear to be throwing their hands up in horror at the economic system their class had helped to create. However, this contradiction is the product of the distinction between bourgeois ideology and the concrete outcomes of bourgeois economic practices. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese discuss the disparity between bourgeois ideology and economic practice in *Fruits of Merchant Capital*. They describe how the free market, founded on 'possessive individualism' and the 'freedom of labour' produced uncertainty and volatility as part of its self-perpetuating dynamic. In order to weather this storm the bourgeoisie made a psychological as well as financial investment in private property. Property offered a tangible demonstration of their wealth but also provided a material basis for the ideology of possessive individualism. In this schema the household became a place of order and productivity dominated by the middle class obsession with household management, which extended to the proper management of servants and children:

The individualist aspirations of those (frequently Protestants) who absorbed the new values of work, time discipline, and thrift, as well as new norms of family life, sexual division of labour, and child rearing, grounded the economic abstraction in the lives of ordinary people and helped create a model of self-conscious well being that at once wedded many to a system that took more from them than it offered in

return and provided the yardstick by which all subsequent socialist critiques would measure the failures of capitalism's promise.³⁷

This ideology, though distinctly bourgeois, offered a critique of the very system that produced it, revealing capitalism's 'broken promise', while reflecting its aspirations and working practices. The 'mini-economy' of the home reflected the work ethic employed in the wider economy, but it also provided a far more atomised and insular form of time management that worked at a different pace from capitalism. The home as a spatially and temporally distinct zone grounded the ideology of possessive individualism. The home became a personal, privatised place with a cultural significance of its own. However, though the home allows the male a sense of self-possession, it could not exist as an ideological form without the very concept of property rights its existence supports.

In Book Two Rousseau sets up a scheme to teach Émile the value of property. This is in contradiction to his own teaching methods as Rousseau has made clear his belief that up to the age of reason a child should not be taught abstract concepts or moral codes. However, he makes an exception to this rule regarding the concept of property, and devises a scheme to illustrate the importance of property rights to Émile. Rousseau has his pupil plant beans on a plot of land. The child takes delight as the beans start to sprout. His tutor explains to him that the beans 'belong' to him because he has given 'his time, his labour, and his trouble, his very self' to the labour of producing them (*Émile*, II, p.72). However, one day on returning to his plot Émile is heartbroken to find his beans have been uprooted. He discovers that Robert the gardener has done this

³⁷ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese. *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rises and Expansion of Capitalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1983), p.192.

because the beans had been planted on land where he had already planted melons. Rousseau has planned all this in order to teach Émile how the notion of property ‘goes back naturally to the rights of the first occupier to the results of his work’ (*Émile*, II, p.75). This right goes back beyond the life span of the present occupier, as Robert comments: ‘I dig what my father tilled; every one does the same, and all the land you see has been occupied time out of mind’ (*Émile*, V, p.75). To an extent then, Rousseau is naturalising feudalism, but for his proviso that property is connected to labour – this of course favours the property-owning aspirations of middle class farmers with the landless labourer being left entirely out of the picture. Indeed the logic of Rousseau’s argument demands that the owner has a perfect right to destroy or appropriate the labour of others working on his land.

Once Émile has reached the ‘age of reason’, the time that Rousseau designates for the emergence of foresight, the foundations have already been laid that will allow him to navigate his way through the world of business: ‘The solidarity of the arts consists in the exchange of industry, that of commerce in the exchange of commodities, that of banks in the exchange of money or securities. All these ideas hang together, and their foundation has already been laid in early childhood with the help of Robert the gardener.’ (*Émile*, III, p.182). However, in teaching Émile about ‘property rights’ so early in his childhood Rousseau contradicts himself by introducing a temporality that is radically at odds with the lived-time of childhood. Property now functions as a knowable unit of space and time forming an ideological totality by which the subject can achieve spatial and temporal orientation – foresight. Max Horkheimer remarks on the importance of middle class property to the rise and fall of the bourgeois individual:

His rise and fall is deeply interconnected with the fate of middle class property. The so-called transcendental factors which constitute the ego: memory and foresight, conceptual thinking, the integration of all experience into one identical conscience knowing itself as the same in past and future, all these elements were tremendously enhanced by the economic situation of the independent producer and businessman. The enterprise, handed down in the family, forced him to think in terms which transcended by far his immediate needs, even his own life span. He thought of himself as an autonomous subject on whom depended not only his own well-being but the prosperity of his family as well as that of his community and state. There was no agency which would tell him what to produce or where and what to buy and sell. He had to plan all by himself, to rely on his own farsighted calculations.³⁸

At the end of Book Five Émile's education is complete. We are left with the prospect of him living a settled life with his wife Sophy and their children as a gentleman farmer with his own estate. He is the very model of the bourgeois individual outlined above by Horkheimer. But all this has come at a cost. His entrance into his fixed estate is founded on an earlier act of psychic displacement, which echoes the historical displacement of peasants from the land. To return to the episode with Robert the gardener, when Émile first plants his bean seeds he delights in their growth, as if the beans represented his own natural growth - the experience of being alive that we associate with lived-time. The immanence that characterises the child's consciousness is then uprooted. Living organisms become property; the land beneath his feet is *occupied*, forcing his psychic dislocation from it. All this, as we have seen, is essential if Émile is to *take possession of himself* in later life. But in doing this Émile is forced to renounce the 'childish' perspective that refuses to draw distinctions between self and environment and thus sees the natural world for what it is (immanent critique), in favour of the legislative frame of bourgeois property rights.

³⁸ Horkheimer, Max, 'Reason Against Itself: Some Remarks on Enlightenment', *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions*, ed. James Schmidt (Berkley: University of California Press 1996) pp. 364-365.

Chapter Three

Wordsworth and the Self Without Origins

The Prelude (1805) is a poem that traces the growth of a poet's mind, beginning with birth and ending in manhood. For Wordsworth, the poet is a man apart, a man of destiny, his fate being subject to the operation of spiritual forces. This contrasts with the concept of the human mind popular during the European Enlightenment. Here the mind was an organ whose operations could be compartmentalised to the extent that human behaviour could be predicted.³⁹ Wordsworth, in contrast, was adamant that the human mind held hidden mysteries beyond the reach of science or philosophy. Thus Wordsworth's account of the growth of the poet's mind can be contrasted with the post-Lockean model of the genesis of human understanding, with some interesting results. This chapter shall make just such a contrast, not only in order to reveal where there are theoretical differences but also where there are points of ideological convergence.

Wordsworth makes clear that his autobiographical poem is not to be dissected too minutely in terms of cause and effect. He refuses to pinpoint identifiable examples of absolute genesis that produce fresh departures in new directions. Things are set in train from his earliest infancy. Change, or rather

³⁹ An early advocate of rational psychology, and a foundational figure in the development of faculty psychology, is the German Christian Wolf. Wolff believed that much of human behaviour could be predicted. In his books *Psychologia empirica* (1732) and *Psychologia rationalis* (1734) he used metaphysical first principals in order to construct a schema by which to acquire knowledge of psychological processes. Roger Smith describes how Wolff developed 'an ordered deductive science comparable to rational mechanics'. As Smith points out: 'Empirical psychology opened out through such projects into the everyday world of the judgements of character, decisions about a child's education and the regulation of the feelings'. Roger Smith, *The Norton History of the Human Sciences* (New York: Norton 1997), pp. 202-203, pp. 200-214.

‘growth’, is the product of accumulative experiences that though influential, are not the sole source of the self that Wordsworth is presenting to us:

But who shall parcel out
His intellect, by geometric rules,
Split, like a province, into round and square?
Who knows the individual hour in which
His habits were first sown, even as a seed
Who that shall point, as with a wand, and say,
This portion of the river of my mind
Came from yon fountain?’

(*The Prelude*, II, 208-215)

In part Wordsworth is reacting against philosophers such as Locke and Rousseau who conceived of the genesis of the human subject as something that could be mapped: ‘like a province, into round and square’. Both philosophers conceive of human beings as beginning as blank slates whose subsequent emergence into self-awareness and knowledge is the result of a process that begins with the mental activities of sensation and reflection. Perhaps the ultimate form of self-awareness for Locke and Rousseau arrives when the subject is able to speculate upon the very mental activities from which he/she is constituted. The fact that both writers provided detailed accounts of the process of self-formation testifies to the fact that they regarded themselves as having attained just such an epistemological perspective. As Charles Taylor makes clear, Locke advocated a ‘disengaged stance’ from which an individual could ‘take charge of the processes by which associations form and shape our character and outlook’⁴⁰. In this way the individual becomes an active agent, able to shape his intellectual destiny. The ability to isolate the processes by which the self is constituted also holds out the potential for shaping the intellectual destiny of others. In this way the ability to disengage oneself from the processes of knowledge formation,

⁴⁰ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989), p.175; 159-176.

allows for the possibility of holding authority over those who are intellectually ‘inferior’, specifically children. It is no surprise then that both Locke and Rousseau produced educational treatises, Locke in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and Rousseau in *Émile*. Such treatises employ a systematic approach to a child’s intellectual development with the aim of allowing the child to reach its full intellectual potential. This posits the concept of ‘the ideal educational outcome’, and by implication the suggestion that other routes to maturity are somehow lacking, producing children who fall short of this ideal. Such children may have been seduced by rival structures of knowledge, falling prey to cultural practices, customs and habits that lead them from the ‘true’ path of Knowledge. Wordsworth in *The Prelude* is reacting against this constructionist model of subject-formation.⁴¹ Significantly, he challenges his opponents by stressing the

⁴¹ Descartes’ division of the human subject into mind and body influenced mechanistic models of the human subject. The body was conceived of as a machine, a collection of functioning parts held together within a material structure. The mind is able to steer and control the body’s mechanical movements. However, the extent to which the mind is master of the body is brought into question, for as John Wright points out, Descartes also conceived of the mind as containing a passive element, that is more closely linked to the operation of the body: ‘Descartes regards most ‘psychological’ processes as being dependent upon physiological structures and motions in the brain and nervous system. Among the psychological functions which he attempts to model in a purely mechanical way are sensation, memory and imagination, appetite and passions, and the automatic behaviour which results from stimuli from these various sources. These functions can all arise from purely physical processes’. John P. Wright, ‘Hysteria and Mechanical Man’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 42, 1980, p.239, pp.233-247). See also Theodore M. Brown, ‘Descartes, Dualism, and Psychosomatic Medicine’, *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays on the History of Psychiatry*, vol. 1, eds. W.F. Bynum et al. (London: Tavistock Publications 1985). Towards the end of the eighteenth century mechanical models of the mind were placing less emphasis on the Cartesian division between mind and body. Particularly within medical discourse and in the emerging field of psychology the operation of the mind was being more closely related to the organic structure of the brain and the functioning of the nervous system. Wordsworth’s attempt to ‘revitalise’ the process of subject formation can be related to debates going on at the time between those who adhered to mechanistic models of the human subject and those who subscribed to the concept of vitalism. Carolyn Steedman describes vitalism as ‘a miscellany of contemporary beliefs united in opposition to mechanism, which contended that living processes could not be entirely explained by reference to their material composition and physico-chemical activity’. For vitalists life forces that could not be reduced to mechanical processes produced and sustained human, animal and plant life. *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930* (London: Virago 1995), p. 52, pp. 43-76. Much of the debate between mechanists and vitalists was taking place in Germany. Wordsworth may have become familiar with the concept of vitalism through Coleridge whose interest in German Natural Philosophy is well documented. The concept of vitalism would certainly have been more in tune with Wordsworth’s religious inclinations than mechanical models of the human subject. Also see

unreasonableness of their argument, in other words he challenges them on their own ground. What Wordsworth proposes is a dynamic relational model of the human soul, one in which a part cannot be separated from the *living movement* of the whole. In Wordsworth's view the simple ideas that Locke isolates, as the building blocks of understanding, cannot be isolated and extracted for analysis. Wordsworth presents us with the image of a cabinet containing the ideational artefacts that allow for a subject's intellectual progress. The image presented is a lifeless one, rather like a skeleton that has been taken apart, so that the function of each individual part can be explained without reference to the whole. Wordsworth addresses his complaint to his friend Coleridge:

To thee, unblinded by these outward shows,
The unity of all has been revealed
And thou wilt doubt with me, less aptly skill'd
Than many are to class the cabinet
Of their sensations, and, in voluble phrase,
Run through the history and birth of each,
As of a single independent thing.
Hard task to analyse a soul, in which
Not only general habits and desires,
But each most obvious and particular thought,
Not in a mystical and idle sense,
But in the words of reason deeply weigh'd,
Hath no beginning.

(*The Prelude*, II, 228-237)

Mothering Desire

In the 'Infant Babe' passage in Book Two Wordsworth presents us with his alternative to the constructionist model of the genesis of human understanding. He attempts to breathe life into the process by which the self emerges. For Wordsworth, the awakening of a child to life is intimately bound

François Duchesneau, 'Vitalism in Late Eighteenth-century Physiology: The Case of Barthez, Blumenbach and John Hunter', *William Hunter and the Eighteenth-century Medical World*, eds. W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985).

up with its relationship to its mother. The introduction of human agency in the form of the mother presents us with an important distinction between Wordsworth and that other philosopher of childhood, Rousseau. In *Émile* Rousseau famously stressed the importance of good quality maternal care during early infancy. Rousseau's discussion of breastfeeding in *Émile*, though riven with contradictions (see Chapter One), recognises that a loving mother is less likely to harm or neglect her infant than an indifferent wet nurse. However, for Wordsworth, a mother's love for her child does more than just predispose the mother to her infant and so ensure its survival; it actually contributes to the child's emotional and spiritual development:

Bless'd the Infant Babe,
(For with my best conjecture I would trace
The progress of our being) blest the Babe,
Nurs'd in his Mother's arms, the Babe who sleeps
Upon his Mother's breast, who, when his soul
Claims manifest kindered with an earthly soul,
Doth gather passion from his Mother's eye!
Such feelings pass into his torpid life
Like an awakening breeze,

(*The Prelude*, II, 237-245)

In Wordsworth's schema, before a child becomes fully aware of itself as having a life distinct from its mother it becomes aware of itself as the object of another's attentions. Though it cannot fully comprehend the meaning behind its mother's gestures of affection it has a sense that they are directed and intentional. The mother's actions then are sign posts that point towards the child, and in time the child orientates itself in their direction. It is at this point that the child begins the process of focussing on valued objects. The objects that he values are those that are orientated towards him such as the breast and eye. In the case of the eye the child turns to meet the desiring gaze of its mother. and in so doing recognises

itself as the desired object, and so the child's earliest desire is for the one who loves him, but it is also for himself as the beloved object. In this way, the trajectories of desire always lead back to him, and so he finds himself enveloped within the loving space of the mother's bodily intimacy. This 'loving space' that contains both mother and child is instrumental not only for the child's emotional and spiritual development, but for his physical and cognitive development. In language reminiscent of that employed by eighteenth-century Enlightenment *philosophes*, Wordsworth describes the process by which the infant's 'organs and recipient faculties' become refined. The mother as human agent still has a crucial role as the love she lavishes on her infant helps to structure this process, as the 'organs and recipient faculties' are 'subjected to the discipline of love'. The mother's love is expressed through her physical interaction with the child and this interaction stimulates the child's senses. But there is also a moral dimension to the mother's actions. Wordsworth presents us with the 'benevolent mother', whose virtue 'irradiates' her actions, imbuing them with a meaning that though expressive of 'goodness' remains enigmatic and necessarily inarticulate. The mother's love then produces an aura that envelopes the child, protecting and nurturing him:

Thus, day by day,
Subjected to the discipline of love,
His organs and recipient faculties
Are quicken'd, are more vigorous, his mind spreads,
Tenacious of the forms which it receives.
In one beloved presence, nay and more,
In that most apprehensive habitude
And those sensations that have been deriv'd
From this beloved Presence, there exists
A virtue which irradiates and exalts
All objects through all intercourse of sense.

(*The Prelude*, ll. 250-260)

Following this the relationship between mother and child does become more interactive and less of a one-way-street. Wordsworth describes how: 'by intercourse of touch, / I held mute dialogue with my Mother's heart' (*The Prelude*, II, 282-283). Wordsworth's description of the 'intercourse of touch' that takes place between mother and child has parallels with the Lacanian 'mirror stage' as it suggests that the infant is beginning to recognise how his behaviour is reflected in his mother's actions. The mirror stage involves a moment of self-recognition in which the child perceives itself in a mirror, or sees its gesture or emotions reflected in another human being. This moment of self-recognition produces a sense of jubilation in the child, compelling him to seek further reflections of itself in its immediate environment. In this way the mirror stage is an important development in terms of the child's spatial awareness, as objects and people become imbued with meaning in relation to their reflective potential.⁴² As a result of this the infant begins to develop rudimentary concepts such as self/other and subject/object. These distinctions force the child to recognise its own spatial position within its immediate environment, and so it becomes aware of itself not just as a subject but also as an locatable object; an object that can be the focus of another's attention.

The mirror stage is an important step towards the eventual emergence of an autonomous individuated self. In terms of the child's development there is a

⁴² Lacan remarks: 'This act, far from exhausting itself ... immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates – the child's own body, and the persons and things, around him'. Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytical experience', *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge 1995) p.1, pp.1-7. For accounts of the mirror stage see: Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (London: Fontana Press 1991), pp.17-43; Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge 1990), pp. 31-35, 24-49. For a fascinating account of the mirror in history, that explores philosophical and cultural questions that help place Lacan in historical context, see Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, *The Mirror: A History*, trans. Katherine H. Jewett (London: Routledge 2002).

blurring of the point at which the child is totally dependent on its mother – when it cannot support its own body weight or move of its own volition – and the point at which basic physical independence is achieved; when it can stand on its own two feet, free of the bodily scaffolding that its mother provided.⁴³ In this sense independence is not so much achieved as discovered: ‘I am standing without assistance’ or ‘I am moving away from my mother’ or the more traumatic ‘I am standing alone and my mother is no longer with me’.⁴⁴ During the mirror stage the child becomes aware of itself as separate from its mother, but it is only able to do this through a process of recognising itself *in* its mother. In this sense the distinction between subject and object, self and other, is somewhat contradictory. Moments of maternal absence force the child to recognise that it has always been ‘alone’, in the sense of being other to its mother. Thus one of the outcomes of the mirror stage is the experience of alienation. Wordsworth’s awareness of his mother’s withdrawal further links his infantile experiences to Lacan’s mirror stage:

From unknown causes. I was left alone,
 Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.
 The props of my affections were remov’d,
 And yet the building stood, as if sustain’d

⁴³ The idea of ‘mirroring’ doesn’t quite address the physicality of Wordsworth’s infant’s interaction with its mother. Certainly the infant’s actions are reflected in the mother’s responses to it, but these responses involve a physical intimacy, a sense of *being with mother*, that cannot be reduced to the experience of having one’s actions mirrored by an external object that posits the subject as a separate being.

⁴⁴ In ‘Tuché and Automaton’ Lacan explores some of the ontological questions raised by a child’s increasing awareness of maternal absence. Lacan uses as his model Freud’s observation of his grandson playing fort-da with a cotton reel. For Lacan the child is attempting to come to terms with his own subjectivity by playing with objects: ‘This reel is not the mother reduced to a little ball by some magical game worthy of Jivaros – it is a small part of the subject that detaches itself from him while still remaining his, still retained. This is the place to say in imitation of Aristotle, that man thinks with his object ... If it is true that the signifier is the first mark of the subject, how can we fail to recognise here – from the very fact that this game is accompanied by one of the first oppositions to appear – that it is in the object to which the opposition is applied in act, the reel, that we must designate the subject’. Jacques Lacan ‘Tuché and Automaton’, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Vintage 1998), p.62. pp. 53-64.

Wordsworth use of the term ‘props of affection’ has led Cathy Caruth to link Wordsworth’s description of the emergence of desire with that of Freud’s and Laplanche’s descriptions of the emergence of sexual drives. Caruth begins by citing the work of a translator of Freud’s *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Jeffrey Mehlman: ‘Mehlman offers a new translation for the word *Anlehnung*, which designates the relation of sexual drive to the instinct of hunger. In place of Strachey’s “anaclisis”, Mehlman suggests the word “propping”’.⁴⁵ Laplanche, in his development of Freud’s ideas, describes how the child’s first encounter with the breast is the result of vital somatic functions, in this case the need for food. The emergence of a drive that derives pleasure from the breast distinct from its function as a provider of milk ‘props’ or ‘leans’ upon its original function, until the breast through displacement becomes a sexual object in its own right. Certainly in Wordsworth’s description the mother’s body does appear to function as a ‘prop’ whose constructive significance is only fully realised with her withdrawal. However, by drawing parallels between Freud, Laplanche, and Wordsworth, Caruth is, I think, going against the spirit of Wordsworth, but this is no bad thing. The parallels between Freud and Wordsworth highlighted by Caruth can be used as a theoretical bridge that reveals a more surprising parallel between Wordsworth and Rousseau. For example, Rousseau in *Émile* stresses the role of the instinct of self-preservation as a guiding force through life that ensures our survival. In a crucial passage he describes the importance of self-preservation to the development of affection, describing how a child’s original

⁴⁵ Cathy Caruth, ‘Past Recognition: Narrative Origins in Wordsworth and Freud’, *M.L.N.*, Vol. 100, 1985, p.935.

hunger for food transforms over time into feelings for the person who is providing the food:

Self-preservation requires, therefore, that we shall love ourselves; we must love ourselves above everything, and it follows directly from this that we love what contributes to our preservation. Every child becomes fond of its nurse; Romulus must have loved the she-wolf who suckled him. At first this attachment is quite unconscious; the individual is attracted to that which contributes to his welfare and repelled by that which is harmful; this is merely blind instinct. What transforms this instinct into feeling, the liking into love, the aversion into hatred, is the evident intention of helping or hurting us. We do not come passionately attached to objects without feeling, which only follow the direction given them; but those from which we expect benefit or injury from their internal disposition, from their will, those we see acting freely for or against us, inspire us with like feelings to those they exhibit towards us. Something does us good, we seek after it; but we love the person who does us good; something harms us and we shrink from it, but we hate the person who tries to hurt us. (*Émile*, IV, p.208-209)

Wordsworth's 'Infant Babe' passage is in part a reaction against mechanistic concepts of the genesis of human understanding and desire. Wordsworth refuses to unlock the mystery of the human subject's beginnings, exclaiming: 'Who knows the individual hour in which / His habits were first sown, even as a seed'. Rousseau in attempting to map the genesis of our earliest feelings and affections is an example of exactly what Wordsworth is reacting against. And yet through a historical irony Caruth is inadvertently associating Wordsworth with the type of methodology, Freudian drive theory, whose previous historical incarnation in Rousseau, Wordsworth explicitly rejected. Wordsworth would have been horrified by Rousseau's functionalist assessment of infantile affection as resulting from the instinct of self-preservation. He would have been equally appalled by Rousseau's suggestion that the mother's role was incidental to the extent that a mother-substitute in the form of a she-wolf might be a suitable replacement, and engender the same feelings of love in those she cares for. The 'good mother' in Rousseau's view is simply someone who does good; Rousseau does not feel the need to present us with any higher spiritual

motivation for her actions: ‘Something does us good, we seek after it; but we love the person who does us good’. In contrast, Wordsworth imbues the mother with a pseudo-religious quality. She is more than just the child’s carer: she is his spiritual and moral guardian.

And yet is the love of a child for its mother as outlined by Wordsworth anymore than, to use Rousseau’s phrase, love for ‘the person who does us good’? The mother in *The Prelude* never appears as a subject in her own right. We learn little or nothing about her life, of what kind of a person she was or even what kind of a mother she was. Certainly we know she was loving and good, but what does this really tell us? The lack of biographical detail is of course partly explained by the early death of Wordsworth’s mother before he was eight years old, and Wordsworth’s reification of his mother, and her subsequent ‘withdrawal’ is at least in part Wordsworth responding to her early loss. And yet this is an insufficient explanation for her almost complete absence, as the withdrawal of the mother in the ‘Infant Babe’ passage occurs at a time in early infancy years before her death. The almost complete absence of the mother in *The Prelude* following the ‘Infant Babe’ passage suggests that though she does not suffer a literal death until Wordsworth is almost eight she does suffer a metaphorical one. This is a point made by Andrzej Warminski, who describes the maternal body in the Infant Babe passage as somehow ‘already dead’, as Wordsworth’s narrative refuses to allow the mother a life of her own:

[I]t is the story of the disposal of the already dead mother’s body: the “props” of the child’s affections are removed, and yet the building stands (that is, the building of the I’s passionate relation to the mother which he can transfer by analogy, as it were, to Mother Nature). But the prop *as* prop (that is, the mother) were always already removed, their removal was the condition for the construction of the building. This means that if Wordsworth’s mother dies in this passage, it is not because it really happened (Wordsworth’s mother died ere he was eight years old) but because, textually speaking, she *had to*: it is a linguistic necessity, one of those “necessary accidents” of language (utterly random and utterly determined

simultaneously - overdetermined). Or to put it even more directly. Wordsworth's mother died so that the Wordsworth Baby could become an 'I' and the Boy Wordsworth could become a poet.⁴⁶

The withdrawal of the mother takes place after her function as the spiritual and physical 'prop' to the infant Wordsworth has been fulfilled, releasing Wordsworth into a world beyond the restrictive dyad of mother and child. He is liberated, compelled by a spirit that though 'gathered' from the mother, is now autonomous and dwells within. The 'death' of the mother releases Wordsworth, allowing his development to continue and his story to be told.⁴⁷

The model of growth outlined by Wordsworth, whereby the child continues to develop independently following the mother's withdrawal – 'as if sustain'd / By its own spirit' - can be related to a general shift in the understanding of the processes of growth in humans towards the end of the eighteenth century.

Andrea Henderson traces a shift in the discipline of embryology away from 'preformationist' concepts of development towards an 'epigenetic' theory of growth. The Preformationists 'understood growth as an increase in size of an already complex creature – one whose limbs, organs, and so forth were understood to be initially invisible only because of the limitations of the human eye'. In contrast the Epigenesists believed 'that the embryo develops and becomes more complex in its organisation, that it changes morphologically rather

⁴⁶ Andrzej Warminsky, 'Facing Language: Wordsworth's First Poetic Spirits', *Romantic Revolutions: Criticism and Theory*, eds. Keneth R. Johnston et al, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1990), p.36

⁴⁷ Mary Jacobus makes a similar point, but with reference to Rousseau's *Émile*. In *Émile* the mother is given a well-defined and mainly functional role. Once this role has been fulfilled responsibility for the child's education passes to the father. Jacobus comments: 'Wordsworth's mother really did die early. But Rousseau's *Émile* suggests that if she were not already dead, she would need to be killed off; that autobiography comes into being on the basis of a missing mother.' 'Behold the Parent Hen: Romantic Pedagogy and Sexual Difference' in *Romanticism, Writing and Sexual Difference: Essays on The Prelude* (Clarendon Press: Oxford 1989), p.242.

than just in size'.⁴⁸ Henderson relates epigenetic models of growth to the emergence of Romantic concepts of the self as independent and self-orientated: '[A]round the turn of the century epigenesis was to triumph definitively over its rivals. It offered, after all, the perfect high Romantic model of human development: a child is less indebted to its parents and its genealogy than to itself for its growth, and to whatever extent the child is not credited with that growth, it is understood as the work of a (non-mechanical) nature'.⁴⁹ Henderson's description of the part played by nature in epigenetic models of growth has a distinctly Wordsworthian air to it. Of course Wordsworth in the 'Infant Babe' passage does not describe the growth of a foetus but the development of a child after its birth. Nevertheless, as Henderson points out, parallels can be drawn between Romantic and Capitalistic models of the self that favour the production of autonomous and self-sustaining individuals. Of particular relevance is the sidelining of the mother as a contributor to the development of her child: 'In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a child must, of necessity, resist a strong connection to its mother in order to establish itself as self-made subject'.⁵⁰ Wordsworth does not exclude the mother from the developmental process. However, the early withdrawal of the mother does seem to suggest that he believed that if little boys are to grow up truly independent they should not be *too* reliant on their mothers. In this sense the withdrawal of the mother is a traumatic but necessary rite of passage. In *The Prelude* as a whole emphasis is placed on the child as the agent of its own 'growth'.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Andrea K. Henderson, *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity 1774-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996), p.31, pp.11-37.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.32

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.33

⁵¹ See L. J. Jordanova, 'Gender, Generation and Science: William Hunter's Obstetrical Atlas', *William Hunter and the Eighteenth-century Medical World*, eds. W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter

But what, might we ask, would happen if the mother failed to withdraw at the 'appropriate' time? Two poems from the *Lyrical Ballads*, 'The Thorn' and 'The Mad Mother', illustrate Wordsworth's anxiety about how a mother's persistent presence and/or uncontrolled desire can result in the stifling of the emergence from infancy of an autonomous self.

Desiring Mothers

In his note to 'The Thorn' included in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) Wordsworth makes clear that the reader's attention should be focused on the eccentricity of the narrator and not just on the story he narrates. Wordsworth describes the narrator as a retired man with time on his hands who having moved to an area where he is not a native has become prone to superstition and 'credulous and talkative from indolence'.⁵² All this of course puts into question the reliability of his point of view and deters the reader from making too close an identification with him. Nevertheless, despite the distance Wordsworth places between himself and the narrator I persist in reading 'The Thorn' as a poem that reveals much about male anxiety concerning female irrationality and the power bestowed on women during pregnancy and motherhood. I think that on an unconscious level Wordsworth shared these anxieties, but was able, through an act of dramatic displacement, to enact a disavowal of them. The narrator of 'The Thorn' is undeniably ridiculous, but it is

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985). Shirley A. Roe, *Matter, Life, and Generation: Eighteenth-century embryology and the Haller-Wolff Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981).

⁵² William Wordsworth, 'Note to 'The Thorn'' (composed late September 1800) in *Lyrical Ballads: Wordsworth and Coleridge*, eds. R.L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Routledge 1991) p. 285.

the imagery of 'The Thorn' that arrests my imagination. The imagery of 'The Thorn' as the product of Wordsworth's poetic imagination perhaps reveals something of his unconscious fears. Moreover, these fears are not just expressed in 'The Thorn' but recur in 'The Mad Mother', a poem that like 'The Thorn' employs a dramatic persona, suggesting again that Wordsworth felt uneasiness with these poems' subject matter.

'The Thorn'⁵³ begins and ends with the image of a thorn bush that 'looks so old / In truth you'd find it hard to say / How it could ever have been young' (1-3), and yet we are told that the bush is: 'Not higher than a two years' child' (5). We learn in the second stanza that parasitic creeping plants are stifling the thorn's growth and seem intent on dragging it to the ground:

Up from the earth these mosses creep,
And this poor thorn they clasp it round
So close they say that they were bent
With plain and manifest intent
To drag it to the ground –
And all had joined in one endeavour
To bury this poor thorn for ever.

(16-22)

Beside the thorn bush there is a 'muddy pond' the dimensions of which 'three feet long and two feet wide', are just big enough for an infant's grave. Also contained within the scene is a 'beauteous heap, a hill of moss'. The narrator of the poem is more explicit about its dimensions, the hill: 'Is like an infant's grave in size, / As like as like can be' (52-53). The narrator then informs us of a woman who goes to this spot at all times of the day and night crying to herself: 'Oh misery! Oh misery! / Oh woe is me! Oh misery!'. The meaning of this eerie spectacle is not known conclusively even by the narrator of the poem.

⁵³ 'The Thorn' from *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) eds. R.L. Brett and A. R. Jones, pp. 70-78.

Indeed the narrator even attempts to enlist the help of the reader/listener.

suggesting that they go to the spot: 'Perhaps when you are at the place / You something of her tale may trace' (109-110). The narrator then proceeds to tell us what he does know. The story involves Martha Ray, a woman jilted by her lover Stephen Hill, whose promise of marriage to her was preceded by his promise to marry another. Stephen's abandonment of Martha produces the onset of insanity:

Poor Martha! On that woeful day
A cruel, cruel fire, they say,
Into her bones was sent:
It dried her body like a cinder
And almost turned her brain to tinder.

(128-132)

The depiction of Martha's body as being dried out as a result of her emotional trauma places Wordsworth's poem in the context of eighteenth-century medical discourse. In *Madness and Civilisation* Michel Foucault describes how in the eighteenth century the mental disorder of 'mania' was associated with a 'drying out' of the sufferer's mind and body: 'The rigidity of fibres in a maniac always belongs to a dry landscape; mania is regularly accompanied by a wasting of the humors, and by a general avidity in the entire organism. The essence of a maniac is desertic, sandy'.⁵⁴ Clearly Martha's symptoms are characteristic of those of mania. We subsequently learn that Martha was pregnant: 'She was with child and she was mad' (139). What happens to the child, whether it was born dead, died of natural causes or was murdered, no one but Martha knows. But the strongest implication is that an act of infanticide has taken place. For the eighteenth-century reader this would have

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Tavistock Publications 1967), p. 127.

been the most likely conclusion as the image of the thorn bush would register symbolically in the context of folk and literary traditions which, as Mary Jacobus points out, commonly associated the thorn tree with ‘illegitimate birth and child-murder’.⁵⁵

From the outset of the poem we have a strange intermingling of cultural discourses. On the one hand we have the language of folk lore, the ballad tradition and oral culture, while on the other hand we have something approaching medical discourse, but this discourse is being voiced by superstitious villagers and the poem’s narrator, whose emotional sensitivity and lack of objectivity makes him the very antithesis of ‘the man of science’. At the centre of all this discursive confusion we have a woman, Martha Ray. It is her plight and its cause that fascinates. After all the seepage of language from our narrator is an attempt to make sense of ‘Martha’. Alan Bewell ‘reads’ Martha and ‘The Mad Mother’ in the context of eighteenth-century medical discourse and sees both women as representative of the figure of the hysterical woman. Bewell compares Wordsworth’s fascination with the figure of the hysterical woman with that of Freud’s. Both writers studied hysteria in order to gain a better understanding of the nature and operation of the human mind, and in particular its relationship to language: ‘Just as Freud, a century later, turned to ‘hysterical women’ as a scientific point of departure for psychoanalysis, Wordsworth also found in these women a medium of speculative argument, a means for observing and forcefully delineating, as he notes in connection with *Lyrical Ballads*, the manner in which “language and the human mind act and

⁵⁵ Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads (1798)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1979), p.241.

react on each other.”⁵⁶ But, as Bewell acknowledges, it is unlikely that Wordsworth would have approved of people reading ‘The Thorn’ purely as case history. Wordsworth appears uncomfortable with employing medical discourse.⁵⁷ The narrator, from evidence gathered from local villagers, gives voice to Martha Ray’s symptoms, but as Bewell points out, the voice we hear is more than a little hysterical itself. Moreover, reading the poem in the context of the discourse of hysteria risks reducing the experience of reading to a diagnostic process, and what Wordsworth demands from his reader is an emotional response to Martha’s suffering. But then why did Wordsworth include traces of medical discourse in the poem at all? Certainly he desires his reader to feel compassion for Martha, but he does not want them to identify with her, or the narrator for that matter, too closely. The ‘astute’ reader must distance himself from these people, he must have compassion for them but identify them as psychologically ‘other’. For Martha Ray is not just a hysterical woman, she is a woman who elicits a hysterical response. Hysteria appears contagious, and its mode of transmission is language.

Another means of contagion is the body of the hysteric. In ‘The Thorn’ and ‘The Mad Mother’ we are presented with women who have been pregnant, and one who is a mother. The bodies of these women threaten to ‘contaminate’ their unborn or newly born children. The child in the womb, or in its mother’s

⁵⁶ Alan J. Bewell, ‘A ‘Word Scarce Said’: Hysteria and Witchcraft in Wordsworth’s ‘Experimental’ Poetry of 1797 – 1798’, *ELH*, vol. 53, 1986, p. 360.

⁵⁷ For Bewell, to read Wordsworth in the context of the discourse of hysteria is to go against the grain of the text: ‘The paradox of Wordsworthian observation is that his eye is attracted to specific kinds of marginal individuals for reasons that his poetry will not admit. In examining his representation of hysterical women, then, we are in the difficult position of needing to read his poetry against the grain, asking questions and reconstructing operant discourses that the poems were written to counteract or make irrelevant. Yet by recovering this language, we will be able to recognise the revaluation of, and strategical distancing from these women and the medical discourse that first represented them’. Alan J. Bewell, ‘A ‘Word Scarce Said’: Hysteria and Witchcraft in Wordsworth’s ‘Experimental’ Poetry of 1797 – 1798’, p.360.

arms, cannot distance itself from its mother and depends on her body for its survival. Thus whereas the reader can identify difference in relation to the discourse of hysteria, the presence or more disturbingly the unaccountable absence of a child from these poems produces a sense of helplessness and anxiety in the reader. For to identify with the child's plight involves confronting the fear of being enveloped within the psychic space of the hysterical other without recourse to linguistic difference.

Going back to the Greeks and up to the first half of the twentieth century, mental illness in women has tended to be related to the female body and its functions. In classical Greek thinking the condition of hysteria was believed to originate in the uterus. Theories such as the 'wandering womb' suggested that the uterus was capable of wandering around the body and causing disease to those organs it came into contact with. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century hysteria did not tend to be so directly connected with the womb, but was still associated with other female bodily functions such as menstruation. Certainly in the eighteenth century the relationship between mind and body was seen to be closer in women than in men. The source of Martha's mental breakdown comes from outside her body, and so perhaps in the strictest sense she cannot be characterised as suffering from hysteria. But the issue is complicated by Martha's pregnancy, which might imply the development of puerperal insanity. And yet this 'diagnosis' is not straight forward as the narrator's description does not in any clear way relate Martha's madness to the fact that she is pregnant. Indeed at times the baby in Martha's womb managed to cool her troubled mind:

Old Farmer Simpson did maintain
That in her womb the infant wrought
About its mother's heart, and brought
Her senses back again;

And when at last her time drew near,
Her looks were calm, her senses clear.

(149-154)

Now it is quite possible that the narrator is implying that the moment of clarity that came over Martha just before she was to give birth actually gave rise to the idea of infanticide. Alternatively we might also see this moment of mental calm as a positive outcome of her confinement. After all, pregnancy during this period was regarded as the ultimate expression of a female's 'natural' purpose. From this we might assume that pregnancy would bring about psychological balance. The narrator does appear to believe this, describing the presence of the foetus as having a soothing influence that momentarily succeeds in bringing Martha back to her senses. Thus we might conclude that it is during the post-natal period that Martha's mania returns.

It is not only the effect of pregnancy on Martha's mental health that the narrator is concerned with, it is also the effect of Martha's madness on her developing child. The narrator expresses concern that the symbiotic relationship of the foetus in the womb to its mother might result in the transference of the mother's mental state to her child. The narrator expresses concern for the child in this scenario, and for the mother, but he expresses concern for the mother at one step removed, adding the interjection 'as you may think':

Sad case for such a brain to hold
Communion with a stirring child!
Sad case (as you may think) for one
Who had a brain so wild!

(144-147)

A clear connection is being made between body and mind in the case of female insanity. The female body is sensitive to psychological change, to the extent that such changes are *communicated* throughout the body. To use the

language of the eighteenth century, the natural *sympathy* that exists between an expectant mother and her growing child might allow for the transmission of mental imbalance.⁵⁸ Foucault describes how eighteenth century medical discourse conceived of the composite organs of the female body as highly attuned and in sympathy with one another: ‘The entire female body is riddled by obscure but strangely direct paths of sympathy; it is always in an immediate complicity with itself, to the point of forming a kind of absolutely privileged site for the sympathies; from one extremity of its organic space to the other, it encloses a perpetual possibility of hysteria’.⁵⁹ By implication if a woman is pregnant then the child in her womb is contained within this hyper sensitive organic structure where the possibility of some kind of hysterical eruption is ever present. In ‘The Thorn’ the foetus attempts to compensate for and even to counteract the impulses of its mother’s hysterical body. But though the internal battle for the foetus’ sanity may have been won, the real threat comes after birth, when the child is exposed to its mother’s irrationality but is no longer able to soothe her troubled mind.

⁵⁸ John Mullan illustrates some of the anxieties that eighteenth-century medical men had about the effect of a pregnant woman’s state of mind upon her developing child. He cites the example of Robert James who in his three volume *Medical Dictionary* (1743-1745) addresses the issue of how an expectant mother’s imagination can shape the future desires of her child. Mullan remarks: ‘Under his heading “IMAGINATIO” in his *Dictionary*, Robert James provides at least three dozen supposed illustrations, drawn from other medical writings, to support his contention that “the ... Desire of the pregnant Woman is capable of marking the tender Infant with the Thing desired.” The entry in the Dictionary, is, indeed, concerned *solely* with the dangers to which a pregnant woman, always liable to “the Power of the *Imagination* or *Fancy*,” subjects her offspring. The improper or volatile “Desire” raised in the woman by reading the wrong books or thinking the wrong thoughts intervenes in the process of the reproduction of the social order.’ John Mullan, ‘Hypochondria and Hysteria: Sensibility and the Physicians’, *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 25, no.2, 1984, p.159, pp.141-174. Mullan’s point about the risk posed to the reproduction of the social order by the flights of fancy of pregnant women is an important one. For the symbiotic relationship between a pregnant woman and her unborn child is beyond the control of medical men. They could only speculate upon the possible ill effects of ‘improper’ thoughts. Ultimately medics were out of the loop, unable to intervene and act upon their social constructionist tendencies.

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.153-154.

Elaine Showalter in *The Female Malady* provides us with three Romantic archetypes for female insanity: 'The troubling, ambiguous nature of female insanity was expressed and perpetuated by three major Romantic images of the madwoman: the suicidal Ophelia, the sentimental Crazy Jane, and the violent Lucia'.⁶⁰ Of these three archetypes Martha most closely resembles Crazy Jane. Crazy Jane is 'a poor servant girl who, abandoned by her lover or bereft of him through death, goes mad as a result'.⁶¹ Ballads about Crazy Jane date back to the 1790s with the first being written by Matthew 'Monk' Lewis in 1793. According to Showalter Crazy Jane does not pose a threat to the patriarchal order, because even though she is abandoned by her male lover she remains psychologically dependent on him: 'Crazy Jane was a docile and harmless madwoman who devoted herself single-mindedly to commemorating her lost lover ... The appeal of Crazy Jane is not hard to fathom. What activities could be more feminine and respectable, or pose less of a threat to domineering parents and false hearted men? For Romantic writers, Crazy Jane was a touching image of feminine vulnerability and a flattering reminder of female dependence upon male affection'.⁶² Martha's insanity, like Jane's, is triggered off by her desertion by her lover. But though she sinks back into docility following the death of her child, and though her mournful behaviour may appear harmless, Martha, unlike Jane, does pose a threat to the patriarchal order. In a subversion of the 'Crazy Jane' narrative, Martha does not haunt the places where she and her lover courted, but the suspected burial site of her child. Thus a mother's relationship to her child, a relationship whose emotional intensity is sustained by the fact of

⁶⁰ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago 1985), p.10.

⁶¹ Ibid p.11.

⁶² Ibid, p.13.

the child's death, challenges the centrality of the male lover as the single focus of female desire. If the repressed violent emotions that Martha felt towards her unfaithful lover are redirected towards her child, then Martha's seeming vulnerability disguises potentially destructive impulses. Another of Showalter's archetypes is 'Lucia'. Lucia is based on Lucy Ashton from Walter Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoore* (1819). Lucy, prevented from marrying the man she loves, murders the man she is being forced to marry in a fit of insanity. Showalter sees Lucy as representing 'female sexuality as insane violence against men'.⁶³ Perhaps what Wordsworth's Martha represents is the male anxiety that seemingly harmless 'Crazy Jane' figures may unexpectedly transform into their violent counterparts.⁶⁴

Whether Martha's newborn child is murdered or born dead the narrator is unable to say, but he is almost convinced that the hill of moss is its burial site.⁶⁵ The infant haunts this site, but so too does the mother. She is in a permanent state of mourning, doomed, like a ghost, to return to the site of her alleged crime. Once again, the mother is somehow already dead, as she is unable to move on.

⁶³ Ibid p.14.

⁶⁴ James Averill notes the significance of the name Martha Ray to the Wordsworth household. Martha Ray was the grandmother of the child Basil Montagu who was staying with the Wordsworths at Alfoxden around the time of the poem's composition. The real Martha Ray was the victim of a crime of passion, and was shot dead by a Mr Hackman in a theatre. Averill makes the connection to Erasmus Darwin's description of Erotomania in his *Zoonomia*, a book Wordsworth had read. Darwin cites the case of Martha Ray as an example of the extreme consequences that can arise from Erotomania, consequences that can include acts of murder, suicide or revenge. Averill identifies Erotomania as a possible model for the mental condition depicted in such poems as 'The Mad Mother', 'Ruth', and 'The Thorn'. James H. Averill, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1980), p.167.

⁶⁵ It is useful to relate Martha's alleged infanticide and concealment of her child's birth to social and medico legal attitudes to such crimes in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. 'The Thorn' can be seen as a threshold poem in terms of its attitude to infanticidal women. For though some among the locals seek retribution for Martha's crime, the overriding attitude of the poem, and certainly that of the narrator, is one of cautious sympathy for Martha. For a discussion of the emergence of a more sympathetic attitude to infanticide as reflected in legislation and the attitudes of judges and juries around the turn of the century, see Chapter Seven of Roger Smith's *Trial by Medicine: Insanity and Responsibility in Victorian Trials* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1981) pp. 143-160. Also see Elaine Showalter's discussion of puerperal insanity in *The Female Malady*, pp.55-59.

Life for her is the repetition of a state of misery that she cannot progress beyond. An association is made in the poem between female madness, repetition, and the stasis this produces.

The child does not 'haunt' the spot in the same way as the mother does, though his spirit is trapped within its confines. Indeed the narrator is more afraid of the unexpected appearance of the mother than the presence of the child's spirit. The child does not present himself for inspection but must be looked for. It is said that anyone who goes to the pond and stares intently at its surface will see the face of the child staring back at them:

Some say, if to the pond you go,
And fix on it a steady view,
The shadow of a babe you trace,
A baby and a baby's face,
And that it looks at you;
Whene'er you look on it, 'tis plain
The baby looks at you again.

(226-231)

Jerome Christensen highlights the narcissism of this scene, with the search for the child's image strangely mirroring the search for one's own reflection: 'Looking for the child is the same act as looking into the pool for one's own reflection: looking for the source which would make sense out of a world of disorientating suggestive differences is looking for an image that would affirm by reflection the integrity of the self'.⁶⁶ In this instant the onlooker does not 'find' his own face but the unfamiliar face of a baby. But, in a sense, this face is not unfamiliar, as it represents a stage in human development that we have all passed through. So we might say that in a symbolic sense this *is* the

⁶⁶ Jerome Christensen, 'Wordsworth's Misery, Coleridge's Woe: Reading 'The Thorn'', *Papers on Language and Literature*, vol. 16, 1980, p.284.

reflection of the onlooker, not the face of who he/she is, but of what he/she was. We might then describe the experience as an uncanny one, what was once familiar now appears as unfamiliar. The face of the child is like the resurfacing of a forgotten memory. The horror of the scene comes from the fact that the child can never breach the developmental gap between it and the onlooker. Its constant gaze speaks of his yearning to do just that, as if it is desperately trying to recognise something of itself in the human form before it. And yet its development has been stunted, rather like the thorn bush whose development parasitic plants have held back. The mother's constant mourning for her dead child contributes to this sense of stasis, and of course the suspicion hangs over the poem that it was her murderous act that prevented her child from reaching adulthood in the first place.

'The Mad Mother' repeats many of the themes of 'The Thorn'. Like Martha, the Mad Mother has been abandoned by a man, in this case her husband. The sense of claustrophobia in the poem is heightened as the reader is subjected to her monologue. The only perspective offered, but for the first descriptive stanza, is that of the Mad Mother. The mother directs her speech to her silent child, trying to convince it, and perhaps herself, that she means it no harm: 'To thee I know too much I owe, / I cannot work thee any woe' (19-20).⁶⁷ However, we learn that she has been delusional in the past, imagining fiendish faces pulling at her breast. The delusional fantasies of the Mad Mother give her a witch-like aspect: 'A fire was once within my brain, / And in my head a dull, dull pain; / And fiendish faces – one, two, three, / Hung at my breasts, and pulled at me' (21-

⁶⁷ William Wordsworth, 'The Mad Mother' from *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) in *Lyrical Ballads: Wordsworth and Coleridge*, eds. R.L. Brett and A. R. Jones (London: Routledge 1991) pp. 83-86. *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed Duncan Wu (London: Blackwell 2001), pp. 244-246.

24).⁶⁸ The child's sucking action is psychologically soothing, and produces a moment of clarity in which she is able to recognise the child as her own and is able to feel genuine love for it. James Averill notes the influence of Erasmus Darwin on the depiction of breast-feeding in the poem. Darwin in *Zoonomia* describes how suckling a child can have a positive effect on mentally ill mothers as the maternal affection it inspires counteracts their insanity: 'the child should be brought frequently to the mother, and applied to her breast, if she will suffer it, and this whether she at first attends to it or not; as by a few trials it frequently excites ... maternal affection, and removes the insanity'.⁶⁹ However positive the initial effects of breast-feeding were on the Mad Mother, she appears to be developing a psychological dependency on it as a means of cooling her mania. She is clearly using breast-feeding as a means of regulating her mental state:

Suck, little babe, oh suck again!
It cools my blood, it cools my brain;
Thy lips I feel them, baby, they
Draw from my heart the pain away.
O press me with thy little hand,
It loosens something at my chest;
About that tight and deadly band
I feel thy little fingers pressed.

⁶⁸ 'The Mad Mother' like 'The Thorn', is illustrative of changing attitudes to mentally disturbed women in this period. In earlier centuries the mad mother may well have been regarded as a witch. However, in Wordsworth's poem she is shown to be displaying classic symptoms of mania rather than demon possession. Wordsworth's thinking expresses an enlightened suspicion of superstitious explanations for mentally aberrant behaviour. Roy Porter in his *A Social History of Madness* describes how the thinking of the Enlightenment changed the attitudes of physicians to the extent that 'so called witches came to be characterised as hysterics or, at a later stage, as neurotics' Roy Porter, *A Social History of Madness: Stories of the Insane* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1989), p.112, pp. 103-124. See also Alan J. Bewell, 'A "Word Scarce Said": Hysteria and Witchcraft in Wordsworth's "Experimental" Poetry of 1797 – 1798', pp. 357-390. Such treatment of delusional women was indeed more enlightened than the witch-hunt that preceded it. But this development must be seen in the wider context of the Enlightenment's antagonism towards the supernatural. Mentally ill women may no longer have been regarded as enemies of God, but they would have been in opposition to the new sovereign force in the universe, Reason. Thus mentally ill women are other to the dominant discourses of their time whether they are characterised as the demonic other, or the post-Enlightenment irrational other. This 'othering' provides a pretext for public censure and control, though in more enlightened times this would have involved loss of liberty rather than loss of life.

⁶⁹ Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia, or the Laws of Organic Life* (London: J Johnson 1796), p.360. cited in James H. Averill, *Wordsworth and the Poetry of Human Suffering*, p. 156.

The breeze I see is in the tree,
It comes to cool my babe and me.

(31-40)

The poem enacts a reversal of the dependency of a child on its mother. Here the mother relies on her child for her psychological well being. She is also, paradoxically, dependent on the child's dependency: 'The babe I carry on my arm, / He saves me for my precious soul. / Then happy lie, for blessed am I - / Without me my sweet babe would die' (47-50). The division between self and other is forever being blurred in the poem. The mother is clearly projecting her own madness onto the child, sometimes seeing her own insanity in its face: 'Alas, alas! that look so wild, / It never, never came from me: / If thou art mad, my pretty lad, / Then I must be forever sad' (87-90).

The power of the mother's monologue is that it renders the reader powerless. Unlike 'The Thorn' the reader has no narrator to mediate and even perhaps intervene on the child's behalf. Moreover the Mad Mother believes herself to be a good mother; certainly, she is operating outside the normal moral spheres of action, but she clearly loves her child. Indeed, it is her overbearing love that produces anxiety in the reader and Wordsworth. It is the refusal of the Mad Mother to withdraw, as the mother of the 'Infant Babe' passage does, that makes 'The Mad Mother' such a disturbing poem. The mother refuses to let go of her child. She wishes to be its sole companion throughout its life. The poem ends with the mother taking her child to the woods to go in search of her husband, where she hopes the three of them can live together forever.

The Mad Mother feels most at home amidst nature. But her relationship to nature is very different from that of the Romantic poet. The Mad Mother is less an objective onlooker than part of the wild-life that surrounds her. The Mad Mother is reduced to her basic animal instincts. She represents raw motherhood:

the unsocialised mother tending to her young. She is regressing away from society towards the state of nature.⁷⁰ Wordsworth's fear of *maternity unbound* may relate to his anxiety that such a woman's animal instincts may bear too close a relation to her imagination. This would produce aberrant desires unmediated by the demands of civilization; demands that in other circumstances frame our imaginative horizons. Foucault notes the link between madness and animality, and recognises in the fear of animal passions the anxiety that 'something' might break free from the restraints imposed by reason: 'It is not on this horizon of *nature* that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries recognised madness, but against a background of *Unreason*; madness did not disclose a mechanism, but revealed a liberty raging in the monstrous forms of animality'.⁷¹ The real fear for Wordsworth is that the liberation that the Mad Mother experiences by connecting with her animal instinct provides her with an alternative source of knowledge that does not involve her exercising her reason in a socially acceptable fashion:

Oh smile on me, my little lamb,
For I thy own dear mother am.
My love for thee has well been tried;
I've sought thy father far and wide.
I know the poisons of the shade,
I know the earth-nuts fit for food;
Then, pretty dear, be not afraid –
We'll find thy father in the wood.

⁷⁰ In noting the link between animality and madness Foucault comments on how the animal passions of the insane gave them an animal-like ability to survive exposure to rough conditions and extremes of temperature: 'Animality, in fact, protected the lunatic from whatever might be fragile, precarious, or sickly in man. The animal solidity of madness, and that density it borrows from the blind world of beasts, inured the madman to hunger, heat, cold, pain. It was common knowledge until the end of the eighteenth century that the insane could support the miseries of existence indefinitely. There was no need to protect them; they had no need to be covered or warmed' (Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.74). The mad mother certainly matches Foucault's description. As Foucault realises madness of this kind was not linked to physical feebleness. Moreover, the mental energy displayed in the form of animal passions should make us wary of attaching terms as 'feeble minded' to such people. For a further discussion of the relationship between women and nature in Wordsworth's poetry see: Marlon B. Ross, 'Naturalizing Gender: Woman's Place in Wordsworth's Ideological Landscape', *ELH*, vol. 53, 1986, pp. 391-410; pp.400-401.

⁷¹ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation*, p.83.

Now laugh and be gay, to the woods away,
And there, my babe, we'll live for aye.'

(91-100)

The Mad Mother has knowledge of the natural world to the extent that she can support herself using natural resources. More than this she is going to mediate the experience of nature to her child and take on the role of its teacher: 'I'll teach my boy the sweetest things, / I'll teach him how the owlet sings' (142-143). In *The Prelude* such 'lessons' are administered by Nature alone. We need only think of the Boy of Winander's mimic hootings to the owl.

In the final stanza the mother's power to sustain life or bring about the death of her child is emphasised, as the knowledge she has of naturally occurring poisons and sources of food could either be used to prolong life or to end it. But whether the child lives or dies the overriding implication of the poem is that the child's development will not be allowed to occur freely as it will always be subject to its mother's 'irrational' desires.

Unnatural Teachers

Wordsworth's anxiety about the extent and influence of maternal psychology on a child's development places him within the frame of patriarchal discourses that go back to the eighteenth century and earlier. A key figure, once again, is Rousseau. Like Wordsworth, Rousseau acknowledges the role of the mother as *initiator*. The love a child bears towards its mother orientates its earliest instincts and feelings, directing them outward towards an external love-object, the mother:

The child should love his mother before he knows what he owes her. If the voice of instinct is not strengthened by habit it soon dies, the heart is still-born. From the outset we have strayed from the path of nature. (*Émile*, I, p. 16)

Whereas ‘The Mad Mother’ expresses the fear that women might revert to their animal instincts Rousseau attacks women for becoming too urbane and attached to the products of civilisation. As we have seen from our discussion in Chapters One and Two, Rousseau was deeply concerned about the changing nature of motherhood in his time. Rousseau regarded many modern mothers, particularly those who lived in town, as going against ‘the sweet task imposed on them by nature’, and neglecting their children. Women’s natural desire had gone elsewhere, seduced by the allures offered by urban living. Thus their ‘natural’ desire for their children had been misdirected. Rousseau, as we have seen, chose to lay nearly all the problems of his age at the feet of these ‘unnatural’ mothers. But Rousseau does not stop here; he also accuses those mothers who show too much love for their children of being a pernicious influence. Crucially, like his description of those who neglect their infants, those who lavish too much attention on their children are described as tempting ‘our feet from the path of nature’, the insinuation again being that such women are unnatural mothers: ‘There is another by-way which may tempt our feet from the path of nature. The mother may lavish excessive care on her child instead of neglecting him; she may make an idol of him’ (*Émile*, I, p.16). In Rousseau’s view women who lavish excessive care on their children soften them up, damaging them by protecting them from the hardship necessary for their future health. Rousseau always defers to nature as providing the standard by which all should adhere. Nature is the ultimate counterbalance, the medium by which all human actions are to be judged. Rousseau presents it as neutral, but of course Rousseau

appoints himself as its interpreter. It is he who judges who has strayed from the path. For Rousseau it is difficult for women and mothers to put a foot right. God forbid a male child should stay too long in female company and be indoctrinated into feminine culture, as women in Rousseau's view make dreadful teachers:

[T]he child passes six or seven years in the hands of women, the victim of his own caprices or theirs, and after they have taught him all sorts of things, when they have burdened his memory with words he cannot understand, or things which are of no use to him, when nature has been stifled by the passions they have implanted in him, this sham article is sent to a tutor. (*Émile*, I, p.18)

Too direct a parallel should not be drawn between Wordsworth and Rousseau. Wordsworth does not condemn mothers in the misogynistic fashion that Rousseau does. In poems like 'The Thorn' and 'The Mad Mother' Wordsworth is sympathetic to the abandoned mother, indeed in 'The Thorn' it is the absent father that the narrator condemns: 'Oh me! Ten thousand times I'd rather / That he had died, that cruel father!'. Nevertheless, poems like 'The Thorn' and 'The Mad Mother' do display an anxiety about the irrational mother. These are not negligent mothers, but mothers whose capacity for love has been misdirected, and this misdirection is beyond the control of the mother herself. Wordsworth's response to this aspect of human fallibility is to minimise the role of the mother. He does this in *The Prelude* by introducing a maternal substitute in the form of Nature.

The Relationship between Nature and Desire in Wordsworth and Rousseau

For Rousseau 'true happiness consists in decreasing the difference between our desires and our powers' (*Émile*, II, p.52). In other words we are

happiest when our desires fall within the sphere of what it is possible for us to obtain. For Rousseau man in a state of nature comes closest to achieving equilibrium between his powers and his desires, as primitive man's wishes are closest to his needs. His actions, for example the satiation of his hunger, are linked to his most basic instincts, and the necessity for self-preservation. For Rousseau then, natural man might not provide us with an image of ecstatic joy, but he does provide us with the template for a life relatively free of unhappiness: 'It is only in this primitive condition that we find the equilibrium between desire and power, and then alone man is not unhappy' (*Émile*, II, p.52). Modern man in contrast is unhappy because of the operation of his imagination that posits objects of desire that extend beyond his basic needs. These objects of desire are often beyond his grasp, and even when momentarily satisfied, he tends to want more. Thus for Rousseau, imagination is in large part responsible for our unhappiness:

It is imagination which enlarges the bounds of possibility for us, whether for good or ill, and therefore stimulates and feeds desires by the hope of satisfying them ... Thus we exhaust our strength, yet never reach our goal, and the nearer we are to pleasure, the farther we are from happiness. (*Émile*, II, p.52)

Wordsworth follows in the footsteps of Rousseau by conceiving of nature as a place of equilibrium, of natural balance. However, his concept of the imagination is a positive one.⁷² He does not conceive of the imagination exclusively in terms of object-orientated desire. Rather imagination can be related to being: to be in an imaginative state of consciousness. Rousseau's theory of desire stresses time over space. The temporality of desire is structured

⁷² For a comparative study of Rousseau and Wordsworth conception of the imagination see Margery Sabin, 'Imagination in Rousseau and Wordsworth', *Comparative Literature*, vol. 12, 1970, pp. 328-345.

in relation to the presence or absence of the object of desire, and to the existential experience of yearning. Wordsworth in contrast conceives of Nature as a space capable of containing and sustaining the imaginative individual. His theory of desire stresses space over time in so far as it is expansive. The space of Nature is responsive to our imaginings. It nurtures them, allowing them to expand.

Wordsworth also divorces the imagination from its genesis in instinctual desires and physical drives. This in turn allows him to reify Nature as a sacred, self-sustaining, spiritual space, a space that transcends the every day battle for survival. For Wordsworth Nature provides a 'home' for the imagination.

It also provides a 'home' for the Infant Babe following the withdrawal of his mother. Nature intervenes before the child is fully reconciled to his loss, or indeed has fully understood the concept of loss. The presence of Nature allows his epistemological development to continue in a state of unbroken happiness:

All that I beheld
Was dear to me, and from this cause it came,
That now to Nature's finer influxes
My mind lay open, to that more exact
And intimate communion which our hearts
Maintain with minuter properties
Of objects which already are belov'd,
And of those only. Many are the joys
Of youth; but oh! What happiness to live
When every hour brings palpable access
Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight,
And sorrow is not there.

(The Prelude, II, 296-307)

Significantly, in the 'Infant Babe' passage the mother withdraws before the child identifies its mother as a separate desiring subject. Using a psychoanalytical framework, the withdrawal of the mother should signify that her desire is not exclusively orientated towards her child. This posits the

intrusion of a third term, and in classical psychoanalysis this is the father. But the father is not named by Wordsworth in the passage; all Wordsworth leaves us with is the rather vague comment that the mother's withdrawal was the result of 'unknown causes'. It is worth noting that if the mother is 'killed' off in *The Prelude*, the father is hardly present at all. Indeed the most we hear of him is in Book Eleven when Wordsworth informs us of his death. In this sense Wordsworth is an orphan not only literally but also psychologically, as he gives the impression that both his mother and father were absent from his life long before their deaths.

Wordsworth's earliest experiences of Nature are reminiscent of the intimacy he experienced before the withdrawal of the mother. The child is enveloped by Nature, without the intrusion of any human other, rather like a child in the womb. Nature, as omnipresent but ever changing, elides the binary of absence and presence. This constant state of flux and change means the child is constantly stimulated, without having to cope with the trauma of withdrawal. The binary of inside and outside is further blurred by the stress Wordsworth places on aurality in the child's communion with Nature. Nature enters the child's consciousness through its sense of hearing:

For I would walk alone,
In storm and tempest, or in starlight nights
Beneath the quiet Heavens; and, at that time,
Have felt whate'er there is of power in sound
To breathe an elevated mood, by form
Or image unprofaned: and I would stand,
Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
Thence did I drink the visionary power.

(*The Prelude*, II, 321-330)

The experience of listening does not spatially define the listener. Sound fills space, both the inner space of the mind and the outer space from where it reverberates. In contrast, the presence of a spatially locatable image or form would posit an outside as it would create a co-ordinate in the form of a fixed object in space. This in turn would posit the onlooker as a locatable embodied subject with a particular perspective. Wordsworth, by stressing sound over vision, can avoid locating himself as a disengaged spectator, and can instead have an experience that is ‘by form and image unprofaned’.

Wordsworth like Rousseau conceives of Nature as being an absolute standard and an uncontaminated source of knowledge, revealing not only how we should live but who we really are. However, unlike Rousseau who in *Émile* sets up a tutor as the interpreter of nature’s intentions for his pupil, Wordsworth comes close to dispensing with external human agents altogether, choosing instead to imbue Nature with an active principle. In Book Five of *The Prelude* Wordsworth opposes Nature as the administrator of the cosmic order, against the attempts of educationalists like Rousseau to impose pedagogic order on a child’s development. However, Wordsworth’s philosophy of education cannot be fully understood without further reference to his own development into a relatively self-sufficient child comfortable in his own company. In Chapter Four we shall explore key moments from Wordsworth’s childhood from Books One and Two, in the belief that an appreciation of the developmental progress of the child Wordsworth will help us to better understand the educational beliefs of Wordsworth the man.

Chapter Four

‘Knowledge not purchas’d with the loss of power!’: Self-empowerment and the Threat of Authority

Socialisation and the Use of the Object

In the ‘Infant Babe’ passage in Book Two the transition from the comfort offered by the proximity of the mother’s body as a communicative space of reciprocal love, to the comfort, and expanded opportunities for physical, psychological and spiritual growth offered by the natural landscape, is related to the sudden, somewhat traumatic withdrawal of the mother’s body. However, elsewhere in *The Prelude*, in Book One, this transition is expressed in more gradual terms. The child is drawn to the natural landscape as a space that offers expanded opportunities for play and exploration. But the mother’s presence as a fixed locus, providing psychological security and a home to return to, is crucial to the child’s sense of well-being. In his early infancy the knowledge that ‘mother is at home’ appears to have given Wordsworth the confidence to *move away* from his mother and to begin to indulge in autonomous play.⁷³ This is expressed in the passage in which Wordsworth compares himself to a ‘naked savage’ running abroad from his mother’s hut:

Oh, many a time have I, a five years’ child,
A naked boy, in one delightful rill,

⁷³ Brooke Hopkins uses Winnicott’s essay ‘The Capacity to Be Alone’ to explore the process by which the young Wordsworth develops an independent personal life away from his mother. Winnicott argues that in order for a child to achieve independence he/she must first experience the security of a reliable and sustaining maternal environment. Such an environment will give the child the confidence to indulge in individual pursuits. See Brooke Hopkins, ‘Wordsworth, Winnicott and the Claims of the “Real”’, pp. 195-196, p. 201. D.W. Winnicott, ‘The Capacity to Be Alone’, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (London: Karnac Books 1990) pp. 29-36.

A little mill-race severed from his stream,
Made one long bathing of a summer's day,
Basked in the sun, and plunged, and basked again,
Alternate, all a summer's day, or coursed
Over the sandy fields, leaping through groves
Of yellow grunsel; or when crag and hill,
The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height,
Were bronzed with a deep radiance stood alone
Beneath the sky, as if I had been born
On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut
Had run abroad in wantonness to sport,
A naked savage, in the thunder-shower.

(*The Prelude*, I, 291-304)

This passage points to Wordsworth's growing independence from his mother, but his sense of independence also involves the knowledge that there is a maternal environment that he can return to. We might infer from this passage that it was not enough for Wordsworth to know where this environment could be found, it was also important for him to know that his mother was *mindful* of him. His mother may not be with him, but he knows he is in her thoughts: 'mother is thinking of me'. In this sense the 'maternal environment' becomes a fixed location both in the sense of it being in a locatable place and in the sense of the child *imagining* his mother to be in a consistently caring and attentive posture. However it needs to be pointed out that the maternal environment has a meaning that extends beyond the physical presence of the mother. The maternal is signified by the mother's hut, not by the actual mother, and Wordsworth is conceiving his play in terms of a fantasy scenario, where he plays a naked savage, and the maternal presence confers enough familiarity on the landscape to allow him to imagine running away. We might compare it to the scenario of the infant who runs from his mother in the sure knowledge that she will run after him. What Wordsworth is employing is the metaphor of the maternal. He is no longer entirely dependent on his mother's literal presence, but is still able to deploy the 'maternal' in order to familiarise his environment.

In the 'Infant Babe' passage the mother's 'beloved presence' is described as irradiating and exalting: 'All objects through all intercourse of sense'. The mother's presence illuminates the child's immediate environment, rendering objects meaningful, and reflective of the child's emotional state through his sensory engagement with them. The child's sensory engagement with its home environment, an environment made meaningful by the mother's auratic presence, imbues objects with a lifelike quality. Of course an infant's conception of the difference between living and non-living objects is limited.⁷⁴ But the limited nature of its understanding means that it is able to imagine that objects have an auxiliary life because of the way that they appear to be orientated towards him. We have seen this in relation to the mother's breast and eye, and though these are objects attached to a living subject, at an earlier stage in development they appear to the child as objects in their own right. We might then say that for the infant Wordsworth his relationship to maternal objects in infancy is an important foundation that allows for the development of the psychological capacity to imbue familiar objects in the home environment with a 'friendly' aspect. In this way the feelings of love he expresses towards his mother spreads out, transforming his immediate environment into an emotionally resonant space: a space that appears to be sympathetically disposed towards him. At the same time the child's increasing environmental awareness suggests a growing independence from the mother. The mother is no longer the sole focus of little William's attention. He becomes aware of a world beyond her. Over time he is able to

⁷⁴ Wordsworth's fascination with the way children are not fully able to distinguish between the living and the dead, and the spiritual significance of this is explored in his poem 'We are Seven'. In the Preface (1800) to the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth remarks that the poem was intended to explore 'the perplexity and obscurity which in childhood attend our notion of death – or rather our utter inability to admit that notion' (pp. 247-248). *Lyrical Ballads: Wordsworth and Coleridge*, eds R. L. Brent and A. R. Jones (London: Routledge 1991).

transfer some of the emotions he feels towards his mother, emotions fashioned by the 'discipline of love', to objects in the wider world.

Wordsworth's stress on the development of the capacity for feeling in infancy can be seen as a reaction against Enlightenment rationalism.

Wordsworth refuses to reduce the child's emotional life to the experience of pleasure and pain, or the drive for self-preservation. Rather Wordsworth stresses the bond between an infant and its mother as constitutive of its emotional outlook. The child's emotional outlook colours its perception of the world, and imbues its sensory engagement with its environment with emotional content.

However, Wordsworth's stress on sensation, particularly touch, as the means by which he becomes attuned to his surroundings, and as a process that facilitates physical growth that is independent of the mother, has clear parallels with Rousseau's educational model in *Émile*.

In Chapter One we discussed Rousseau's emphasis on what he calls 'the education of things' and his suspicion of the too early socialisation of children. Thus Rousseau limits the child's contact with the social world, and focuses instead on facilitating the child's encounter with his surroundings, in order that the child might experience the maximum amount of sensations, all of which will contribute to his physical growth and practical knowledge. Wordsworth also emphasises the importance of physical play and sensory interaction with the natural landscape in relation to his own childhood. His description of his childhood self spending a summer day playing in the mill-race, alternatively basking in the sun, before plunging into water, is something that Rousseau would have approved of, as it provides the child with contrasting sensations of hot and cold, wet and dry. But Wordsworth here is doing more than indulging in a

programme of self-development, and his repetitious desire to plunge himself into the water is psychologically more complex than the compulsion to indulge in a pleasurable sensation. Unlike Rousseau, Wordsworth's developing spatial and environmental awareness begins with his engagement with the mother. The mother then is the 'prop' upon which all subsequent development depends. Nevertheless, at a certain stage the mother recedes into the landscape, as in the image of the child as a 'naked savage' running 'abroad in wantonness to sport': the child must *move away*. The child's moving away is subsequent to the child's experience of the mother's 'withdrawal'. Thus as the child becomes conscious of the mother's limitations, and discovering that its mother is not an inexhaustible source of love, sustenance, and sensory pleasure that is constantly at his disposal, he begins to enact his own withdrawal. By withdrawing himself he gains some psychological control over the mother's earlier traumatic withdrawal. Moreover he finds in the natural landscape what he *imagines* to be a limitless realm of sensory delight; a realm that cannot withdraw from him, and so smoothes over the sense of separation that accompanies the 'discovery' of subject/object relations. The space of nature cannot be reduced to the status of an object, and so does not provide Wordsworth with a fixed locatable object position that he cannot occupy. Thus, unlike the mother, the natural landscape can be given the attribute of always *being there*, even when the child withdraws from it. In this way it *more* than compensates him for his mother's limitations.

And yet, Wordsworth's ability to perceive the natural landscape as a *living environment*, containing spiritual forces that are attentive to his needs, could not have occurred without his first experiencing a loving and interactive relationship with his mother. The feelings that the child develops towards what a

rationalist would perceive as inert organic structures and natural phenomenon would not have occurred if the child had not developed the ability to 'humanise' the world around him. This ability is a by-product of the child's developing imaginative potential, a potential that emerged from the imaginary realm the child inhabited whilst enveloped in the maternal space of its mother's body. Nevertheless, as the child moves away from the mother the original social bond that allows for the emergence of the imagination is disavowed. Nature is perceived by Wordsworth as an imaginative realm in and of itself, as in the description of the river Derwent that 'loved / To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song' (*The Prelude* I, 272-273), nature is described as having a will of its own. Moreover, far from being a passive screen upon which the child projects his imaginings, nature plays a constitutive role in the child's developing imaginative capacity: 'And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice / That flowed along my dreams' (*The Prelude*, I, 275-276)

The child Wordsworth makes his world meaningful through play. He engages his imagination in order to make seemingly arbitrary events and accidental situations appear to be of great importance. This yearning after meaning, this need to make the process of living of significance, appears to take on an added impetus following Wordsworth's move to his school at Hawkshead in May of 1779. James Heffernan relates what Wordsworth describes as his being 'transplanted' to Hawkshead, to the trauma of separation that accompanied his mother's death. Wordsworth's mother died just before he had reached the age of eight, and around a year later, 'ere I had seen / Nine summers', his move to Hawkshead takes place. So the two events are close enough in time to compound the sense of separation Wordsworth would have felt at leaving his

childhood home for the first time. And yet as Heffernan points out, the trauma of this ‘uprooting’ is something Wordsworth ‘simultaneously represses and expresses’.⁷⁵ Indeed the move to Hawkshead is described as liberating, as it allowed for the possibility of a wider range of new experiences: ‘there were we let loose / For sports of wider range’ (*The Prelude*, I, 305-306). Once again, Wordsworth’s development is understood in terms of an expansive model, with each developmental stage associated with the child’s entrance into a wider theatre of experience that supersedes and to an extent subsumes the one that preceded it. We might describe this process as a kind of spatial overlapping. As the child becomes increasingly familiar and secure in his immediate surroundings, he also becomes aware of the limitations they impose upon his experience, and is compelled to seek new experiences in new surroundings. In this way the ‘original’ maternal space, the space upon which all subsequent environmental awareness is ‘propped’, becomes submerged beneath the psychic weight of new experiences. And yet, as Heffernan makes clear, this process of submersion is not entirely successful. Heffernan uncovers the repression of the experience of maternal loss in the nature of the sports that Wordsworth indulges in, for example the acts of theft that he commits directly following his move to Hawkshead. Two of these acts of theft involve either birds or birds’ eggs, and as Heffernan points out, birds in *The Prelude* typically appear as mothers, as for example in Wordsworth’s description of his own mother as a parent hen in Book Five. It is quite possible then, that in these acts of theft Wordsworth is unconsciously searching for his mother.

⁷⁵ James A. W. Heffernan, ‘The Presence of the Absent Mother in Wordsworth’s *Prelude*’, *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 27, 1988, p.260.

The idea that the stealing episodes in Book One involve Wordsworth's unconscious desire to search out his mother is a compelling one. But the unconscious object of these 'missions' should not distract us from the wider significance that Wordsworth attaches to them. The child Wordsworth as 'meaning-maker' elaborates upon events in his young life, reading meaning into the seemingly incidental or procedural. For example in his description of the egg-stealing episode, in which he plunders eggs from where 'The mother-bird had built her lodge', the unconscious motivation may well have been to search out the 'mother'; but what becomes significant to Wordsworth is the experience he has whilst acting upon this compulsion. Wordsworth retrospectively downgrades the original aim of the exercise, to steal the eggs, as being in some way mean-spirited and morally questionable, whereas what he experiences whilst attempting to steal the eggs is raised up to the extent that its importance supplants his original objective: 'Though mean / My object and inglorious, yet the end / Was not ignoble' (*The Prelude*, I, 339-341). What the child experiences is a newfound independence:

Oh, when I have hung
Above the raven's nest, by knots of grass
And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock
But ill sustained, and almost, as it seemed,
Suspended by the blast which blew amain,
Shouldering the naked crag, oh, at that time
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ears; the sky seemed not a sky
Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds!

(*The Prelude*, I, 341-350)

As Wordsworth hangs upside down above the raven's nest he finds himself in a precarious position, being 'ill sustained' he must rely upon the natural features that surround him and his own bodily strength to hold him up.

Wordsworth was clearly a physically robust child with an acute awareness of the natural world, and he is bringing these attributes to the situation he has placed himself in. He is aware that the natural features that are helping to sustain him, the 'knots of grass' the 'slippery rock', are not entirely reliable, but their unreliability adds another level of meaning to the experience. In a sense Wordsworth is confronting their unreliability; he is consciously taking a risk. By risk-taking Wordsworth establishes his independence and autonomy of action, for by placing himself in a situation where he might lose control and fall, he paradoxically takes control by choosing danger and refusing to retreat to a position of safety.

To actively seek the mother is to refuse the passive position that a child takes whilst waiting for its mother. The condition of waiting is a condition of dependence. To wait is to be left to your own devices, in the expectation of the arrival of another. As the infant waits for its mother it is forced to confront its bodily limitations, all of which point to its mortality. Adam Philips describes this situation: 'It is the infant waiting too long for his mother that is travelling towards death because, unattended, he is in the solitary confinement of his body'.⁷⁶ Wordsworth refuses to wait, and goes in search of the elusive object of his quest – the maternal presence. But the danger he faces during this quest frees him from the state of dependence he originally sought to reinstate. He learns to depend upon himself; to support himself free from his mother's arms.⁷⁷ He

⁷⁶ Adam Philips, 'On Risk and Solitude', *On Kissing, Tickling and Being Bored* (London: Faber and Faber 1993), p.24.

⁷⁷ Wordsworth's action can be interpreted as an attempt to find an environment that compensates him for the loss of what Winnicott calls the 'holding environment' of early infancy. Winnicott insists that the 'holding environment' should not be reduced to the physical act of holding, but rather refers to the child's awareness of a secure space that contains him/her: 'The term 'holding' is used here to denote not only the actual physical holding of the infant, but also the total environment provision ... [I]t refers to a three-dimensional or space relationship with time gradually added. This overlaps with, but is initiated prior to, instinctual experiences that in time

learns to rely upon his own bodily strength for support, and thus transforms the passive situation of early infancy where the infant's body places him in a situation of 'solitary confinement', to one where the body establishes a freedom of movement that allows him to take control. Thus though the psychological impetus that placed Wordsworth in this situation is likely to have been an unconscious desire to seek out the mother, the situation allows him to establish his independence from the mother: 'I hung alone'.

And yet, we might ask, would this experience have taken place at all without the impetus of the unconscious desire to seek out the mother? Perhaps not, but if the egg stealing episode was not just a one off, but is a description of an activity that Wordsworth repeated again and again, then the status of the 'object' of this activity is further complicated, for the child discovers whilst searching for company the pleasure of solitude. In this way the 'object' is not entirely 'lost', but is gradually emptied of meaning - a signifier without a signified. Adam Philips describes the circularity of the situation of the child as it waits for its 'object' of desire: 'Through desire the child discovers his solitude, and through solitude his desire. He depends upon a reliable but ultimately elusive object that can appease but never finally satisfy him. But from the beginning, quite unwittingly, he has involved an object'.⁷⁸ The object of an exercise has a structuring role in relation to desire. Wordsworth in his repeated search for the 'lost object' may well have become reconciled to the fact that the

would determine object relationships'. D.W. Winnicott, 'The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship', *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (London: Karnac Books 1990) p. 44. The 'holding environment', though prior to the stage when the child can distinguish between subject and object, contributes to his developing spatial awareness and is foundational to his subsequent development of object relationships. Wordsworth attempt to find an alternative 'holding environment', and his deployment of an 'object', is instructive of his growing sense of independence.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.24.

object of his desire was nowhere to be found.⁷⁹ But this did not lead him to abandon his object altogether, for paradoxically one can always rely more on the certainty of an object being absent than the possibility that it might magically appear. So the 'object' becomes the search for the object, but not the object itself. This perhaps helps explain the somewhat contradictory lines: 'Though mean / My object and inglorious, yet the end / Was not ignoble'.

Wordsworth becomes reliant on his body as a source not just of physical but also of psychological strength. His body then, becomes a sanctuary, a place of habitation rather than confinement. He need no longer preoccupy himself, as an infant must, with the co-ordination of his limbs; he has found his feet. Thus, feeling at home in his body he can see beyond it. So secure is he in his motor skills and ability to orientate himself spatially that he need no longer be overly body-conscious, and can in fact subvert some key developmental concepts. As he hangs upside down he sees the world from a new perspective, a perspective that questions the idea that there is a right way up. Thus Wordsworth's bodily confidence allows him to see the world creatively: 'the sky seemed not a sky / Of earth, and with what motion moved the clouds!'. His new found confidence in his body, means that he can briefly forget that he is at risk of falling, and entrust himself to the moment. But, and this is the crucial point, this moment of imaginative release, was not what he originally sought, it was not his 'object'. What he 'finds' is that beyond the dyad of subject/object, there is 'something' that endures, that abides *in* nature. For a brief moment Wordsworth abides with 'it', before returning to himself and to the occupation in hand.

⁷⁹ Geoffrey Hartman notes as a central argument in *The Prelude* Wordsworth's discussion of our ability to transfer our affections from the lost object of our earliest affections (the mother) to more general object love. *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (London: Methuen 1987), pp. 21-22.

This tantalising moment opens a new vista of spiritual meaning for Wordsworth. He begins to have intimations of a spiritual realm that cannot be read through a rigid adherence to materialism. In fact the materiality of 'things', something that Rousseau insists a child acquaint itself with, becomes for Wordsworth an obstacle to this *other* world; a world that is forever present but not always *felt* to be there. Wordsworth is not content to have brief glimpses of this other world; he wishes the spiritual forces that inhabit this realm to be *mindful* of him, just as he imagined his mother to be as he ran abroad into the thunder-shower. As he hangs above the raven's nest Wordsworth confronts the ultimate childhood anxiety: the fear that he might be allowed to fall. And yet while confronting this fear he becomes vaguely aware of something 'out there' that is not prepared to let him fall, as if the wind that blows about him, and threatens to knock him off balance, is actually holding him up: 'almost, as it seemed, / Suspended by the blast which blew amain'.

Wordsworth elaborates upon his intimations that the natural world is a spiritual realm within which he is safe and secure. Nature begins to develop distinctly parental attributes. It is no longer just a passive presence that inconspicuously 'looks after' him, but an interventionist force that actively 'looks out' for him. For example, before embarking on a description of the boat stealing episode in Book One, Wordsworth describes how on occasion Nature performs 'severer interventions' in order to keep her 'favor'd Beings' on their preordained paths:

But I believe
That Nature, oftentimes, when she would frame
A favor'd Being, from his earliest dawn
Of infancy doth open out the clouds,
As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
With gentlest visitation; not the less.

Though haply aiming at the self-same end,
Does it delight her sometimes to employ
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable, and so she dealt with me,

(*The Prelude*, I. 362-371)

The boat-stealing episode, is an example of one of Wordsworth's earliest expressions of his voluntary will. Such an act of theft transgresses social codes of behaviour, and in this sense is the ultimate act of self-possession. The act of theft is a stolen moment, as the will succumbs to its desires, rather than acting in accordance with the expectation of others. However, in this episode such an action is soon subject to a counter-action, for as the young Wordsworth acts upon his will 'lustily' rowing his boat, he comes into confrontation with what he perceives to be a rival will:

I dipp'd my oars into the silent Lake,
Went heaving through the water, like a Swan;
When from behind that craggy Steep, till then
The bound of the horizon, a huge Cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
With measur'd motion, like a living thing,
Strode after me.

(*The Prelude*, I, 402-412)

Thus the one time object of pursuit, the cliff, appears to take on a life of its own and to face him down, as the pursuer becomes the pursued. Moreover, Wordsworth's voluntary act of stealing the boat, results in the involuntary penetration of his mind by images of the sublime: 'huge and mighty Forms that do not live / Like living men mov'd slowly through my mind / By day and were the trouble of my dreams' (*The Prelude*, I. 425-427). But was Wordsworth ever in control of events? He remarks retrospectively of the incident 'surely I was led by her [Nature]'. This would seem to imply that his voluntary act was in fact

pre-ordained. But if the socially transgressive act of stealing a boat is preordained then how can it be transgressive? It would appear that for Wordsworth all transgressions are necessary digressions on the road to self-knowledge. Thus an event that inspired terror and uncertainty in him is retrospectively transformed into an event that confirms his privileged position within the cosmic scheme of things, and provides him with a sense of security that however terrifying the phenomena he faces might be, his safety is somehow assured.

There is something of a trade off here, for though an interventionist Nature places restriction on Wordsworth's autonomy of action, it provides him with a sense of security that allows him to remain relatively independent of other people. Thus as a child Wordsworth appears to have spent a great deal of time alone in the company of Nature. And yet, the language Wordsworth employs to describe his relationship with Nature has an unmistakably social aspect to it. He *communes* with nature and *converses* with it, and yet these terms are emptied of their origins in human society. Indeed human society is antithetical to the type of 'communication' that takes place when Wordsworth is alone in the midst of nature. Of course in ontological terms the idea of being in the company of Nature is a state of mind that reflects the human need to be in the company of another. Thus the space of Nature *is* a social space, as it contains the *accompanied self*, and the accompanied self is *necessarily* the product of socialisation. Wordsworth then is in the company of himself as a socialised subject. But by conceptually divorcing the experience of society from human community, by experiencing it as a mode of being that can be experienced without the presence of a human other, Wordsworth is able disavow its social

origins. Indeed, more than this, he is able to see his communion with Nature as a form of higher society, as it involves a form of spiritual communion that does not intrude upon him but envelops him within a sympathetic space rather than positing him as an external interlocutor: 'solitude / More active even than 'best society', / Society made sweet as solitude / By silent inobtrusive sympathies' (*The Prelude*, II, 313-316).

Just as Heffernan describes Wordsworth's trauma at his separation from his mother as something that he both expresses and represses, the same might be said of Wordsworth's social instincts. The woodcock-snaring episode of Book One reveals Wordsworth's discomfort in the presence of a collective, whilst simultaneously expressing his contradictory desire to be a part of this collective. Following Heffernan we might see the woodcocks as symbolically representative of the mother, and interpret the episode in terms of Wordsworth's desire to be in the company of the mother. Certainly this interpretation should not be dismissed, but again we should not let it distract us from the wider psychological implications of the episode. Perhaps Wordsworth's initial unconscious impulse is to search out the mother, but in the process of doing so he experiences the discomfort of an individual who finds himself in the presence of a community to which he does not belong:

I was a fell destroyer. On the heights
Scudding away from snare to snare, I plied
My anxious visitation – hurrying on,
Still hurrying, hurrying onward. Moon and stars
Were shining o'er my head; I was alone.
And seemed to be a trouble to the peace
That was among them. Sometimes it befell
In these night-wanderings, that a strong desire
O'erpowered my better reason, and the bird
Which was the captive of another's toils
Became my prey; and when the deed was done
I heard among the solitary hills

Low breathing coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

(*The Prelude*, l. 317-332)

As in all the stealing episodes, the 'object' of the theft is questionable. What Wordsworth confronts here is not just an object he would like to possess - a woodcock - but a social practice. Woodcock-snaring was an integral part of local customary culture, and would have been one of the many activities that went to make up rural community life in the Lakes during this period. Such activities may well have supplemented incomes arising from more conventional agricultural work.⁸⁰ Wordsworth appears to feel himself marginal to the community whose activities he is shadowing, the symbolic representatives of which are the woodcocks: 'I was alone, / And seemed to be a trouble to the peace / That was among them'. His act of theft is an attempt to entangle himself within the social practices of this community. Wordsworth frees the bird, only to make it his captive. He also appropriates another's labour: 'the bird / Which was the captive of another's toils / Became my prey'. On a psychological level by acting on his desire, by appropriating someone else's labour, by making their prey his prey, he himself becomes the object of desire. By imagining himself as the pursued, he becomes embroiled in the rural custom he at first felt marginal to. Indeed the fact that Wordsworth imagines hearing 'Low breathings coming after me, and sounds / Of undistinguishable motion' suggests that his real if unconscious desire is to get caught.

⁸⁰ For a discussion of customary culture during the period see J.M. Neeson, *Common rights, enclosure and social change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993); K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985); E.P. Thompson, *Customs in Common* (London: Merlin Press 1991). For discussions that place Wordsworth's poetry in the social economic and cultural context of their time see for example Kenneth MacLean, *Agrarian Age: A Background for Wordsworth* (Archon Books 1970); David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (London: Methuen 1987).

Wordsworth's desire to be caught up in the life of a community is partially achieved following his move to Hawkshead. Wordsworth develops affectionate friendships with his fellow schoolmates, many of who boarded with him at Ann Tyson's cottage. In Ann Tyson he finds an affectionate mother substitute on whom he could depend. In terms of social class the 'community' he becomes a part of is a complex one. His school friends would have been middle class, but Ann Tyson was a lower class woman who was very much a part of the community in which she lived. Ann Tyson then was more than just a maternal figure; she represented a point of connection between the boys and the local community, and so was key to the boys' increasing familiarity with the customs and characters of the village. The level of cultural crossover that took place is emphasised by Wordsworth's close identification with the life of the rural peasantry. He describes himself as living in a 'lowly cottage' and for much of the year living on a frugal diet, as many of the rural poor would have done:

No delicate viands sapped our bodily strength:
More than we wished we knew the blessing then
Of vigorous hunger, for our daily meals
Were frugal, Sabine fare-and then, exclude
A little weekly stipend, and we lived
Through three divisions of the quartered year
In penniless poverty.

(The Prelude, II, 79-85)

Wordsworth does not appear to regret the 'poverty' of his youth, and does not display any ill will towards his landlady for not providing for him. In fact he views the frugality of his schooldays as a blessing, taking a distinctly Rousseauian line in believing that too much 'delicate' food saps a growing child's strength. We might suspect the accuracy of Wordsworth's comparison of himself to the rural poor, but what is more interesting is that a boy from a middle class home would make such an identification in the first place.

Wordsworth's ability to adapt to the community he finds himself in at Hawkshead can in part be explained by the lessening of the ties that bound him to his childhood home following the death of his mother. The psychological trauma of his 'transplanting' means he is able to quickly adapt to his new situation because he no longer feels himself to be psychologically rooted. But all this comes at a price, for as we have seen, it is during this period that Wordsworth develops a strong sense of independence and self-reliance. So, paradoxically, the very psychological trauma that makes it easier for Wordsworth to adapt socially also produces in him a wariness of immersing himself too completely within the confines of his substitute family at Hawkshead. Finding himself a part of a community, he finds himself empowered to draw back from it. He clearly values the warmth and security of the home that Ann Tyson provides for him, for example describing the home amusements he and his fellow boarders indulged in 'by the warm peat fire / At evening' (*The Prelude*, I, 535-536), but he also delights in drawing back from these home comforts on winter nights:

And in the frosty season, when the sun
Was set, and visible for many a mile
The cottage windows through the twilight blazed,
I heeded not the summons; happy time
It was indeed for all of us, to me
It was a time of rapture. Clear and loud
The village clock tolled six; I wheeled about
Proud and exulting, like an untired horse
That cares not for its home.

(*The Prelude*, I, 452-460)

Even when in the company of other children one gets the feeling that Wordsworth feels himself alone, not in the sense of feeling estranged from his playmates, but in the sense of being somehow independent of them. However, it would be wrong to portray Wordsworth as an antisocial child, in fact he was the

opposite. He developed strong relationships with individual children, as well as being able to accommodate himself within a group. Wordsworth clearly drew strength from being part of a collective, but one of the things that being part of a group strengthened was his ability to be 'at home' in his own company; it is in the company of others that Wordsworth realises the pleasure of solitude.

However, Wordsworth's love of solitude is not a reaction against his school friends. In a sense their acceptance of him, and his fondness for them, sanctions his desire to be alone. In Book Two Wordsworth describes a boat race across Windermere from which he learns something of the 'self-sufficing power of solitude'.

When summer came
It was the pastime of our afternoons
To beat along the plain of Windermere
With rival oars, and the selected bourne
Was now an island musical with birds
That sang for ever, now a sister isle
Beneath the oak's umbrageous covert, sown
With lilies-of-the-valley like a field,
And now a third small island where remained
An old stone table and a mouldered cave-
A hermit's history. In such a race,
So ended, disappointment could be none,
Uneasiness, or pain, or jealousy;
We rested in the shade, all pleased alike,
Conquered and conqueror. Thus the pride of strength
And the vainglory of superior skill
Were interfused with objects which subdued
And tempered them, and gradually produced
A quiet independence of the heart.
And to my friend who knows me I may add,
Unapprehensive of reproof, that hence
Ensued a diffidence and modesty,
And I was taught to feel – perhaps too much –
The self-sufficing power of solitude.

(The Prelude, II, 68-78)

The rural scenes and rustic objects that the boys see during their racing diverts them from their original objective, to be the first over the finish line, and makes the experience as a whole the 'object' of their exercise. What the boys

also share is the experience of physical exertion. The ‘quiet independence of the heart’ that Wordsworth achieves may in part come from the confirmation he receives in his own physical abilities. Thus we might include the body and its physical operations as among the ‘objects’ that have a tranquillising effect on Wordsworth’s mind. As he rests in the shade, he can rest assured in his body’s ability to sustain him. In describing this collective experience Wordsworth underplays the boys’ rivalry. Wordsworth describes how the vainglory of the boys gradually interfused with ‘objects’ that subdued and tempered their pride. For Wordsworth to admit the element of competition would be to draw a social comparison, and he is intent on avoiding this form of individuation. Rather he limits his focus to his own subjective experience. What matters is his experience of the race, both in terms of the physical experience of racing and the imaginative impact of the ‘beauteous forms’ he encounters along the way. The presence of others is incidental. The passage implies that he would have had as profound an experience, perhaps a profounder one, on his own. But unusually Wordsworth feels uncomfortable admitting this, and ironically uncomfortable in the company of his own argument. Fearing reproof he calls on a friend for support. All this, Wordsworth informs us, would be intelligible to someone who truly knew him. In terms of his poetry then, the experience of solitude is not so self-sufficing after all. Moreover, we might conjecture that the experience of the self-sufficing power of solitude is not simply discovered, but is a product of Wordsworth’s socialisation. Wordsworth needed first to be accepted into a community in order to develop the strength to become independent of it, and so able to disavow his former social dependency.

In all the episodes discussed Wordsworth can be seen to be choreographing the experience of 'being William', by representing himself to himself through object orientated action. But the ultimate goal of these representations is to use the object in order to attain a state of consciousness that is independent of the object, to the extent that the object is incorporated into the self or into the action that is being performed. Perhaps the best example of this is the skating episode in Book One:

All shod with steel
We hissed along the polished ice in games
Confederate, imitative of the chace
And woodland pleasures, the resounding horn,
The pack loud bellowing, and the hunted hare.
So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
And not a voice was idle. With the din,
Meanwhile, the precipice rang aloud;
The leafless trees and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron; while the distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy, not unnoticed; while the stars,
Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.

Not seldom from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay, or sportively
Glanced sideways, leaving the tumultuous throng,
To cut across the image of a star
That gleamed upon the ice. And oftentimes
When we had given our bodies to the wind,
And all the shadowy banks on either side
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion, then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stooped short – yet still the solitary cliffs
Wheeled by me, even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round.

(The Prelude, I, 460-486)

Wordsworth begins as part of a collective, skating across the ice in imitation of the hunt. His identity is subsumed in the collective, his movement dictated by the movement of the pack. The object of the exercise is for the children to be attuned to one another as 'confederates', for though their actions

imitate the hunt there is no actual quarry. Wordsworth here achieves the experience of social inclusion he unconsciously sought after in the woodcock-snaring episode. But the object of social inclusion is not sufficient for Wordsworth, and repeatedly he draws away from the group. At these moments he pursues an object of his own choosing, pursuing the reflection of a star. Again the object itself is not the object of pursuit. The fact that it is not an object but the reflection of an object means that he is able to cut across its image, and thus incorporate the 'object' into the action. At other times he consciously draws back from the action he is engaged in: 'reclining back upon my heels'. At these moments it is almost as if he is overtaken by the very experience he is pursuing. The action involves falling back, and what Wordsworth falls back on is an experience of being that is not reliant on the object, or at least uses the object in a negative way by refusing to pursue it. Such moments transport Wordsworth from the temporal and spatial strictures imposed by object-orientated action: 'yet still the solitary cliffs / Wheeled by me, even as if the earth had rolled / With visible motion her diurnal round'.

Wordsworth's desire to retreat from social spaces, in order that he might be enveloped within the space of Nature, can in part be understood in relation to the anxiety he attached to the loss of his original object of affection, his mother. Nature, like the mother, is seen to irradiate natural objects with an emotional resonance. But unlike Wordsworth's infantile experience no single object is alienated from the whole. Whereas the mother becomes objectified, and eventually disassociated from the space upon which she conferred meaning, Nature incorporates its own objects within an indivisible oneness. In this way the feelings that Wordsworth has when alone in the midst of Nature, are not

attached to any one object, and so do not suffer the fate of that object, which in the case of Wordsworth original object of affection was death. Thus for Wordsworth the space of Nature allows for a type of emotional growth that is not dependent on locatable and therefore vulnerable objects. Rather Wordsworth feelings can spread out over the landscape, giving him the sense of being incorporated into an eternal vital space:

From Nature and her overflowing soul
I had received so much that all my thoughts
Were steeped in feeling. I was only then
Contented when with bliss ineffable
I felt the sentiment of being spread
O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart,
O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air, o'er all that glides
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself
And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
If such my transport were, for in all things
I saw one life, and felt that it was joy;
One song they sang, and it was audible –
Most audible then when the fleshy ear,
O'ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,
Forgot its functions and slept undisturbed.

(The Prelude, II, 416-434)

Wordsworth does acknowledge friends and family in relation to his growing up, but by the end of Book Two it is clear that the ultimate accolade goes to Nature: 'If in my youth I have been pure in heart, / If, mingling with the world, I am content / With my own modest pleasures, and have lived / With God and Nature communing, removed / From little enmities and low desires. The gift is yours'. (*The Prelude*, II, 443-448). Strangely then, for Wordsworth the mountains and lakes of Cumbria had a greater impact on refining what are essentially social attributes than such key figures as his mother and Ann Tyson. Ultimately, Wordsworth concludes, Nature not human society is the best

incubator for the growth of a poet's mind. The implications of Wordsworth's conclusion result in the marginalizing of human agency in relation to developmental processes, the full extent of which is revealed when Wordsworth touches upon questions of educational philosophy in Book Five. However, before discussing how Wordsworth marginalizes the authority of human others in relation to his own childhood, and the impact of this on his theory of education, it is important to note how the authority of the 'other', even if it is not perceived as a human other, is not completely dispensed with by Wordsworth, and continues to haunt his decision making into adult life.

Anne K. Mellor's reading of *The Prelude* identifies the Wordsworthian self as expressive of Masculine Romanticism's attempt to assert a model of the self as 'unified, unique, enduring, capable of initiating activity, and above all aware of itself as a self'.⁸¹ She relates this to the possessive model of the self articulated by Locke that asserts that every man 'has a Property in his own Person', remarking of Wordsworth:

The goal of Wordsworth's epic quest, his 'heroic argument and genuine prowess' (III: 183-184), is nothing less than the triumph of the maker of the social contract, the construction of the individual who owns his own body, his own mind, his own labor as he chooses, the achievement of 'Man free, man working for himself, with choice / Of time and place and object' (VIII: 152-153). As Wordsworth enthuses, 'Now I am free, enfranchis'd and at large, / May fix my habitation where I will' (I: 9-10).⁸²

Mellor is right in her assertion that *The Prelude* both responds and contributes to the discourse of possessive individualism. Indeed our discussion of Wordsworth's use of objects in order to establish his independence and autonomy of action addresses itself well to Mellor's formulation. However, one

⁸¹ Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge 1993), p.145.

⁸² *Ibid*, p.147.

of Mellor's quotations, 'Now I am free, enfranchis'd and at large. / May fix my habitation where I will', taken from the glad preamble at the very start of the poem, may appear to present Wordsworth as a man in charge of himself and his destiny, but when placed in a wider context (*The Prelude*, I, 1-271).

Wordsworth's assertion becomes fraught with contradictions and anxieties.

At the beginning of the poem, Wordsworth does indeed present himself as a man at liberty, free to dedicate himself to 'chosen tasks' (*The Prelude*, I, 33), but this sense of freedom has its own attendant anxieties. For if one can proceed in any direction and not lose one's way (*The Prelude*, I, 19), then implicit in this assertion of freedom is the assumption that there is no right way to proceed. Similarly, if one is able to choose any object or occupation then by implication such a choice is arbitrary. But of course this is not what Wordsworth, who regarded himself as a 'favor'd Being', believed: he believed his path in life was preordained. At points Wordsworth's sense of predestination does indeed give him a sense of freedom. He has learnt from childhood to trust in Nature whose timely but subtle interventions will keep him on the right path: 'I look about, and should the guide I chuse / Be nothing better than a wandering cloud / I cannot miss my way' (I, 15-19). A parallel can be drawn with *Émile* and the idea that children should be given freedom in order that they might realise the destiny that God, working through nature, intended for them. This presents the somewhat paradoxical assertion that we are free in order that we might act within the constraints of God's purpose.

In adulthood, as M.H. Abrams has pointed out, Wordsworth's sense of himself as having been chosen or singled out transforms into a belief that he is

destined to become a poet-prophet in the tradition of Milton:⁸³ 'poetic numbers came / Spontaneously, and clothed in priestly robe / My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem, / For holy services' (*The Prelude*, I, 60-63). Following these thoughts Wordsworth acknowledges that he must indeed 'choose' to dedicate himself to his appointed task. Wordsworth's sense a spiritual vocation complicates the idea of him as a man in possession of himself and his own destiny. He cannot *inhabit* the freedom of the present, much as he revels in it, for his true preordained place of legitimate habitation is under construction, for Wordsworth's 'true' self *is* his life's work, most notably the monumental project of constructing what he hoped would be his poetic masterpiece, *The Recluse*:

I had hopes
Still higher, that with a frame of outward life
I might endue, might fix a visible home,
Some portion of those phantoms of conceit
That had been floating loose about so long,
And to such being temperately deal forth
The many feelings that oppressed my heart.

(*The Prelude*, I, 127-133)

By this stage in Book One, the freedom to choose one's occupation or place of habitation celebrated in the glad preamble, though expressive of a sense of autonomy, is also suggestive of the self as derelict, unable to gather itself together so as to fix upon a single purpose or place of destination. Increasingly freedom of choice appears as indecision: 'Time, place, and manners, these I seek, and these / I find in plenteous store but nowhere such / As may be singled out with steady choice' (I, 169-171). Wordsworth feels a strong desire to defer embarking on his appointed task, but this is no longer a positive choice, for he realises that if he is in dereliction of his duty then he cannot *inhabit* his future.

⁸³ See M.H. Abrams' *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (London: Norton 1973), p.19-32; 73-80.

More than this Wordsworth begins to fear retribution for failing to live up to his promise:

Far better never to have heard the name
Of zeal and just ambition than to live
Thus baffled by a mind that every hour
Turns recreant to her task, takes heart again,
Then feels immediately some hollow thought
Hang like an interdict upon her hopes.
This is my lot; for either still I find
Some imperfection in the chosen theme
Or see of absolute accomplishment
Much wanting – so much wanting – in myself
That I recoil and droop, and seek repose
In indolence from vain perplexity,
Unprofitably travelling towards the grave,
Like a false steward who hath much received
And renders nothing back.

(The Prelude, I, 257-271)

In the next section we will continue to look at how Wordsworth favours a model of autonomous growth in relation to childhood development, and how he is suspicious of any adult placing themselves in a position of authority over children. We might assume from this that in adulthood Wordsworth would feel free from the expectations and demands of authority figures and so be able to determine his own future. But clearly this is not the case. The feelings that he might have attached to a human authority figure have been displaced onto a metaphysical Other, who expects to be rewarded for the time and attention He has lavished on his 'chosen son' (*The Prelude*, III, 82). So though little is made of earthly mothers past early infancy, and still less of earthly fathers, the Heavenly Father, operating through the natural world, a realm of non-human otherness, continues to exert an influence. Moreover, in Wordsworth's description of himself as a 'false steward' a power relationship is indicated which is very much that of father to son, master to servant. Thus in relation to Wordsworth it is important to note a contradiction, that while Wordsworth does indeed assert his freedom from adult authority and autonomy of action in relation

to his childhood, during his formative years he must also have been internalising a set of expectations that he would come to perceive as external demands imposed on him from without. We might then say that for Wordsworth 'freedom' is not sufficient in and of itself. That the idea of being able to do anything and go anywhere gives rise to an existential fear that it does not matter where you go or what you do. Perhaps in order to counteract this anxiety Wordsworth believed that he had a higher purpose that he was obliged to act upon. Paradoxically, this sense of obligation makes the very freedom it denies worth having.

Growing Independent

In Book Five we see the brief resurrection of the mother in order that she might offer a counterpoint to modern pedagogues such as Rousseau. She is presented as a 'Parent Hen amid her Brood'. However, as Mary Jacobus points out in a remark that reinforces Warminski's observations, Wordsworth's use of the mother is sparing and she soon recedes into the background. The overall impression that Wordsworth hopes to give is that he and his siblings were self-educated, or to use Jacobus' phrase, their education was 'free-range':

If we go back to *The Prelude* passage, the little Wordsworthian brood turns out to be self-hatched, and perhaps self-engendered too. The mother must be absent or dead in order for the child to be father to the man, and the note of the poet's voice satisfying reiterated and prolonged.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Mary Jacobus, 'Behold the Parent Hen: Romantic Pedagogy and Sexual Difference', p.240.

Jacobus is right when she describes ‘the maternal presence as an absence’⁸⁵, but the point needs to be made that there is another absence, the absent father, whose role is given even less significance than that of the mother. Indeed, when in Book Five Wordsworth goes on to attack over-zealous self-appointed tutors, it is illustrative of his reluctance to allow any father-substitute to usurp the father’s authority through the establishment of an authority in *loco parentis*. It is in these circumstances that he turns to the mother as counterfoil. Ironically the mother can be represented as a master practitioner of what Rousseau terms ‘negative education’. She appears content to leave her children well alone so that they might develop at their own pace. The mother is little more than a cipher, God fills her breasts with milk and she feeds her children. She is described as having a ‘virtual faith that he, / Who fills the Mother’s breasts with innocent milk, / Doth also for our nobler part provide, / Under his great correction and controul, / As innocent instincts, and as innocent food’ (*The Prelude*, V, 271-255). Interestingly the mother is assigned a passive role and the father, this time the Holy Father, an active one. So the father still has a symbolic function, even though Wordsworth is reluctant to allow the place of the father to be taken up by mere mortals. This metaphysical father gains control over his children through the exercising of their natural instincts. Once again Wordsworth is able to side-step the issue of the relation between bodily needs and instincts by employing spiritual language. For example food is not just sustenance, but is described as being ‘innocent’, coming from God through the mother rather like manna from heaven. In this scenario the mother need only allow God to work through her, and so need not fear for the health and well

⁸⁵ Ibid, p.240.

being of her children. She is described as being ‘pure / From feverish dread of error or mishap’ (*The Prelude*, V, 276-278).

In contrast to the mother’s hands-off approach, modern systems of education are accused of leading children ‘like a poor man’s Heifer / ...through the lanes in forlorn servitude’ (*The Prelude*, V, 240-241). The product of this type of education is in Wordsworth’s view a ‘dwarf man’ a ‘monster birth’.

Wordsworth’s accusation against such children is that they are too good to be true. Wordsworth satirises them, producing a dizzying list of the accomplishment of one such protégé. Wordsworth describes how well adjusted to society he is, being at home among both the rich and poor and beloved by both, and how he has mastered the arts and sciences. Wordsworth also satirises the absurd goodness of such an individual, his unending virtue. James K. Chandler identifies Wordsworth’s satire on the supposed moral perfection of such a protégé as central to Wordsworth’s argument, and identifies the most likely target for his attack as the fictional child of Rousseau’s *Émile*:

Wordsworth’s particulars are intended to recall the overall impression conveyed by Rousseau’s description of *Émile*, the sense that, in Wordsworth’s mocking phrase, “Briefly, the moral part? / Is perfect” (318-319). The chief target is a delusive fantasy of moral perfectionism, the notion that virtue can be systematically taught.⁸⁶

As Chandler points out there are some discrepancies between Wordsworth’s satiric description and Rousseau’s *Émile*. For example, Wordsworth’s description of the model pupil’s path as being ‘chok’d with grammars’ (*The Prelude*, V, 324-325), does not ring true as a description, for as

⁸⁶ James K. Chandler, *Wordsworth’s Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), p.112. Chandler also provides an impressive list of quotes from *Émile* to support his argument, that when read alongside Wordsworth’s satiric passage only adds to its comic effect. *Wordsworth’s Second Nature*, pp.110-111; 107-116.

Chandler points out there is a strong ‘anti-intellectual strain in *Émile*’.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, Chandler maintains that the overall effect is suggestive of *Émile*.

A far more substantial obstacle to Chandler’s conclusion is the fact that

Wordsworth attacks the vanity of such a protégé:

Vanity
That is his soul, there lives he, and there moves;
It is the soul of every thing he seeks;
That gone, nothing is left which he can love.

(*The Prelude*, V, 354-357)

Chandler points out that in *Émile* Rousseau describes vanity as a negative impulse, and thus suggests that Wordsworth use of the term needs to be understood in the context of Britain following the French Revolution. Chandler describes how Edmund Burke in his *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* described Rousseau as a “philosophic instructor in the ethics of vanity”.⁸⁸ Thus Wordsworth may well be following Burke in associating Rousseau and his writing with vanity. Another explanation is that Wordsworth simply didn’t understand Rousseau’s concept of self-love.

Wordsworth’s accusation of vanity against Rousseau is a clumsy one, because vanity is suggestive of *amour-propre*. For Rousseau, *amour-propre* is the kind of self-love that feeds off social situations in which individuals compete in order to establish their superiority among their peers. This striving for prestige results in the type of social inequality that Rousseau vociferously condemns. The other type of self-love that Rousseau identifies is *amour de soi*. This type of

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.112.

⁸⁸ Ibid, p.115; 114-116.

self-love is the product of the instinct for self-preservation, and places the needs of the individual as paramount. Rousseau recognises this type of self-love as a force for good:

Self-love is always good, always in accordance with the order of nature. The preservation of our own life is specially entrusted to each one of us, and our first care is, and must be, to watch over our own life; and how can we continually watch over it, if we do not take the greatest interest in it? (*Émile*, IV p.208)

Wordsworth may well be collapsing Rousseau's two types of self-love into one another in order to make the broad generalisation that the educational outcome of Rousseau's pedagogic project is a self-centred individual. But what an extraordinary accusation for Wordsworth to make! There are few writers in English literature who have taken a greater interest in their own life than Wordsworth. This is a man who regarded himself as being preordained for poetic greatness. Thus Wordsworth's criticism of vanity, whether it be directed at Rousseau himself or his fictional child, has more than a little of the pot calling the kettle black.

For Wordsworth the central question of who should have authority over a child's developing mind is subsumed by his demand that it should be no one who might detract or take attention away from the child. Wordsworth's thinking is child-centred to the point of isolationism. He attacks those educationalists who would impose their will upon children in order to bend their future to meet their exacting standards. Such men refuse to leave anything to chance, but more importantly for Wordsworth they stand in opposition to the providential order:

These mighty workmen of our later age
Who with a broad highway have overbridged
The forward chaos of futurity.

Tamed to their bidding, they who have the art
 To manage books, and things, and make them work
 Gently on infant minds, as does the sun
 Upon a flower; the Tutors of our Youth
 The Guides, the Wardens of our faculties,
 And Stewards of our labour, watchful men
 And skilful in the usury of time,
 Sages, who in their prescience would controul
 All accidents, and to the very road
 Which they have fashion'd would confine us down,
 Like engines, when will they be taught
 That in the unreasoning progress of the world
 A wiser spirit is at work for us,
 A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
 Of blessing, and most studious of our good,
 Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?

(The Prelude, V, 370-388)

Wordsworth presents his alternative education in the Boy of
 Winander passage. The scene represents a partnership between a child and the
 natural world. Nature is always attentive, and the Boy never coaxed into
 knowledge. What the child does learn he learns through play, and the knowledge
 he does acquire he is only semi-conscious of, he certainly couldn't articulate
 what he has 'learnt' to another:

There was a Boy, ye knew him well, ye Cliffs
 And Islands of Winander! Many a time
 At evening, when the stars had just begun
 To move along the edges of the hills,
 Rising or setting, would he stand alone
 Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering Lake,
 And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
 Press'd closely, palm to palm, and to his mouth
 Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
 Blew mimic hooting to the silent owls
 That they might answer him.- And they would shout
 Across the watry Vale, and shout again,
 Responsive to his call, with quivering peals,
 And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud
 Redoubled and redoubled; concourse wild
 Of mirth and jocund din! And when it chanced
 That pauses of deep silence mock'd his skill,
 Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
 Listening, a gentle shock of mild suprise
 Has carried far into his heart the voice
 Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
 Would enter unawares into his mind

With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain Heaven, receiv'd
Into the bosom of the steady Lake.

(The Prelude, V, 393-413)

The experience of expectation, of waiting, is an experience that forces us to confront the temporality of being. But Wordsworth will not allow the Boy to experience this form of time consciousness for too long a duration. He will not allow the Boy to experience a moment of self-reflection in the gap between call and reply: 'I am the "I" that waits'. Rather if the owl's hoot is too long in replying it is compensated for by another sound: 'a gentle shock of mild surprise / Has carried far into his heart the voice / Of mountain torrents' (*The Prelude*, V, 407-409). Or time is flooded by space as: 'the visible scene / Would enter unawares into his mind / With all its solemn imagery, its rocks / Its woods, and that uncertain Heaven, receiv'd / Into the bosom of the steady Lake' (*The Prelude*, V, 409-413). Thus as Geoffrey Hartman suggests what Wordsworth presents us with is a different mode of expressing the self, a mode that stresses the vocal over the visual:

We find ourselves before a tragic ode to Echo. There is no *imago* here (to borrow the psychoanalytical term), only an *imago vocis*: a "wandering utterance" that cannot be unified or localised.⁸⁹

It is difficult for the reader to picture the Boy of Winander, to imagine his face. To extend Hartman's thinking, it is questionable whether the Boy can face up to himself. After all the 'steady Lake' does not reflect his image but that of the natural world. It is as if the Boy's image is lost within the scene. For Mary Jacobus it is as if Nature is looking away, caught in a moment of self-absorption

⁸⁹ Geoffrey H. Hartman, 'Self, Time and History', *The Fate of Reading and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1975), p.289.

that excludes the Boy: ‘As echo effects give way to mirror effects (owls/boy; boy/nature; sky/lake; poet/grave), supposedly stable distinctions between signs and reality, subject and object, become blurred. The Winander Boy (ostensibly the subject of the passage) is displaced by nature, seemingly caught in a moment of abstraction, as if looking away, or just self-absorbed, for once the object of her own contemplation’.⁹⁰ Similarly it is difficult to place the Boy in a social setting. Indeed as Hartman points out in another piece, it is the landscape that is called upon to remember the boy, not his childhood friends: ‘the Boy dies before speech makes him known to others. Wordsworth’s “ye knew him well” is addressed to native cliffs and islands, not to human companions’.⁹¹ Certainly, Wordsworth describes the Boy’s early death as taking him from his mates, but it is difficult for us to conceive of the child as having children of his own age that he talked to. The Boy of Winander is condemned to social inarticulacy. Wordsworth, the chief mourner, stands beside his grave in mute vigil. Wordsworth’s silence demands that the only way to mourn for the child is to silently abide: ‘I believe that oftentimes / A full half-hour together I have stood / Mute - looking at the grave in which he lies’ (*The Prelude*, V, 420-422). The Boy of Winander is a model child for Wordsworth because he is asocial – the child alone – uncontaminated by humanity. We cannot *know* the child, for in order for the Boy to remain forever within the realm of childhood, he must forego the process of acquiring an identity. However, the adult Wordsworth who stands beside the grave *has*

⁹⁰ Mary Jacobus, *Romanticism Writing and Sexual Difference: Essays on The Prelude* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989), p. 261. Also see Cynthia Chase’s discussion of Paul de Man ‘Giving a Face to a Name: De Man’s Figures’ in her *Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1986). pp. 82-112.

⁹¹ Geoffrey H. Hartman, “‘Was it for this...?’ Wordsworth and the Birth of the Gods’, *Romantic Revolutions: Criticism and Theory*, eds. Kenneth R. Johnston et al, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1990), p.24.

acquired an identity. Wordsworth cannot breach the developmental gap between himself and the Boy and so is left mute; but, it must be remembered, he is the poetic agent of the Boy's stifled development, it is his pen that has brought about the Boy's final erasure from the landscape only to be replaced by the figure of the poet.

Wordsworth refuses to speculate upon the Boy of Winander's development, choosing rather to kill him off than to imagine the type of adolescent or young man he would have made. In this way the Boy of Winander cannot be unfavourably compared to the young protégés whom he criticises for, among other things, their social attributes. Of course to speculate upon the growth of a fictional child into adulthood would result in Wordsworth resembling the very pedagogues he condemns. And yet why does Wordsworth present us with the Boy of Winander at all if such a Boy is doomed to an early death?

Wordsworth's attempt to enter into the debates on education going on during his time is beset by his refusal to play by the rules. Wordsworth's refusal to think of development in terms of identifiable origins means that he is always looking to 'higher' non-human powers in order to explain the growth of a poet's mind. Where the human agent enters the picture, as in the case of the mother, she is little more than an instrument for exercising the divine will, and is quickly dispensed with once her function is at an end. But Wordsworth, despite his spiritual mystification of nearly every educational issue he addresses, at points goes further than the philosophers he questions. *Émile*, it will be remembered, lives much of his life in social seclusion with only his tutor for a companion. Wordsworth goes one step further than this, presenting his childhood self as

virtually self-sufficient. The force of nature, a force that plays an important role in Rousseau's thinking, plays an even more important role in Wordsworth's. Rousseau tends to fall back on the view that if in doubt trust nature. Wordsworth comes close to proposing that we should trust no one but Nature. Wordsworth takes the concept of nature from its materialist origins in the Enlightenment, reifies it into an ideology, and then denies his source.

One episode that threatens to 'uncover' the materiality of the human subject, revealing the human body's status as a physically definable organic structure, is the drowned man episode. Wordsworth, having spotted a 'heap of garments' on the shore of Esthwaite's lake one evening, returns the next day and sees the body of a suicide being dragged out of the water: 'At length, the dead Man, 'mid that beauteous scene / Of trees, and hills and water, bolt upright / Rose with his ghastly face; a spectre shape of terror even!' (*The Prelude*, V, 470-473). For a young boy to encounter the naked dead body of an adult male is an uncanny experience in the extreme. But however stark the contrast may be between the living boy and the dead man, the encounter does involve looking upon the human form in its most exposed state, free of its social trappings. As a narcissistic encounter with the human form it is deeply troubling, for the recognition of resemblance involves the recognition of human mortality. Wordsworth encounters a body of his own gender; an adult body whose shape reveals the eventual shape his own body will take.

Despite the horror of the scene Wordsworth manages to conquer his fear, by deploying his imagination, his 'inner eye', and seeing the spectacle in relation to a more familiar aesthetic register:

And yet no vulgar fear,
 Young as I was, a Child not nine years old,
 Possess'd me; for my inner eye had seen
 Such sights before, among the shining streams
 Of Fairy Land, the Forests of Romance:
 Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw
 With decoration and ideal grace;
 A dignity, a smoothness, like the works
 Of Grecian Art, and purest Poesy.

(*The Prelude*, V.473-481)

Wordsworth's 'inner eye' imbues the scene with 'dignity'; but, to state the obvious, this is a scene entirely without dignity; a desperate man has ended his own life, and what remains of him, a bloated corpse, is on display for all to see. So what is Wordsworth dignifying with his aestheticisation of the scene? It cannot be the life of the dead man, as Wordsworth's aesthetic imaginings blot out the possibility of exploring the man's personality or what might have led to his ending his life. Perhaps Wordsworth is attempting to dignify the human form as a universal ideal made in the Creator's image. But this also cannot be true, as Wordsworth has already allowed his reader to imagine the 'ghastly face' of the corpse. What Wordsworth is idealising is the *process* of aestheticisation itself.⁹² Wordsworth disengages himself from this human tragedy. The human body before him becomes a prop, a screen onto which he can project his imagination. The body becomes a surface, emptied of content, its materiality disembowelled; the surface of the dead man's body now has the smoothness of Greek pottery.⁹³

⁹² See Andrzej Warminski's discussion of the drowned man episode where he links Wordsworth's aestheticisation to Paul de Man's concept of 'aesthetic ideology' in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism*. Andrzej Warminski, 'Facing Language: Wordsworth's First Poetic Spirits', *Romantic Revolutions: Criticism and Theory*, eds. Kenneth R. Johnston et al, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1990), pp. 47-48.

⁹³ Cynthia Chase suggests that the Grecian art that Wordsworth would have been most likely to have in mind were antique marble statues of the human form. Chase suggests that the 'value' of such objects is in part related to the condition of defacement or fragmentation in which they were found. The condition of such objects puts an emphasis on the creativity of the onlooker 'as if their effacement empowered the viewer's 'inner eye' to recognise its own work of recreation'. Cynthia Chase, 'The Accidents of Disfiguration: Limits to Literal and Figurative Reading of Wordsworth's "Books" in *Decomposing Figures: Rhetorical Figures: Rhetorical Readings in the Romantic Tradition* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1986), p. 24, pp. 13-31.

The drowned man episode, like so many others in *The Prelude*, is about taking control. The means of empowerment in this instant is literature. The school library and the library in his father's house provide Wordsworth with a resource that can be internalised and converted into a psychological storehouse of images and narratives that can be applied to troubling situations. The act of reading is an individual act, but it also bespeaks the reader's class. Wordsworth, as bourgeois individualist, shares the collective ambition of his class to 'go it alone'. The middle class 'share' the pursuit of knowledge in order to establish the myth that they are self-made men. Ultimately then the theme of education in Book Five is about empowerment through the acquisition of knowledge. The Enlightenment model of the all-knowing tutor is rejected because it would involve a loss of power. Indeed, Cynthia Chase suggests that the figure of the tutor is not just rejected but 'done-away with', as the drowned man of Book Five was inspired by Wordsworth's childhood recollection of the drowning of a local school teacher: 'Wordsworth's polemical argument – do away with the schoolmasters! – gets transformed in the course of book 5 into an incident that literally does away with one. The exemplary educational episode consists in seeing a teacher as a dead man. Literary education proves its efficacy in the ability to circumvent mere 'vulgar fear' of the 'ghastly face' of the school master risen again'.⁹⁴ Unlike tutors, books allow for the acquisition of knowledge without demanding submission to another human being. Whereas for Rousseau books are the 'curse of childhood',⁹⁵ for Wordsworth they are its delight, as they set children's imaginations free and allow them to pursue their own path to

⁹⁴Cynthia Chase, 'The Accidents of Disfiguration: Limits to Literal and Figurative Reading of Wordsworth's "Books"', p. 31.

⁹⁵ See William A. Ulmer, 'Rousseau's *Émile* and Wordsworth's Drowned Man of Esthwaite', *English Language Notes*, vol. 33, 1995, pp. 15-19.

knowledge: 'May books and nature be their early joy! / And knowledge, rightly honor'd with that name, / Knowledge not purchas'd with the loss of power!' (*The Prelude*, V, 447-449). Thus Wordsworth is able to deploy the knowledge he has acquired in order to establish himself as an autonomous individual.

But does Wordsworth's presentation of himself as an autonomous individual necessarily demand that he symbolically 'dispose' of male authority figures who might pose a challenge to him? Is Chase right to see the drowned man episode as Wordsworth 'doing away with' the school-master? Another way of reading the episode is to see the drowned man not as a representative of Wordsworth's triumph over adult male authority, but rather Wordsworth's attempt to overcome the loss he experienced at not having a male authority figure to triumph over. Moreover, the drowned man might inspire fear, but the fear he inspires is not because he poses an immediate threat, but rather that his naked body reveals something of human vulnerability; it is his powerlessness that terrifies. Wordsworth uses his imagination to cover up the dead man's exposed body, to clothe him in his thoughts.

As has been pointed out, in *The Prelude* Wordsworth's father is rarely mentioned as making any contribution at all to his child's development. By asserting his self-sufficiency, by implying that children are better off without 'men' who attempt to stand in *loco parentis*, Wordsworth avoids confronting any feelings of loss and abandonment he may have felt. Wordsworth may celebrate his childhood independence, but this perhaps conceals the sadness that he felt at having to be so independent. This sadness is perhaps most strongly conveyed in Book Eleven.

In Book Eleven the experience of loss is linked to the experience of being lost and seeking guidance. Wordsworth describes an episode in his childhood when he became detached from his guide James, but what is significant is what he *finds* when searching for his lost guide. He comes across a spot where a gibbet used to be, and because the grass has been cleared away from the spot he is able to discern the carved name of the man who was executed. Thus in searching for another he encounters a signifier of absence, perhaps revealing to him that beneath all experience there is a sense of loss, of times past and people gone, that the intensity of the moment cannot quite occupy. The experience of ‘searching for’ can be related to the experiences of waiting and ‘looking out for’ an expected other. This is what Wordsworth, aged around thirteen, remembers doing when he and his brothers waited for the horses that would take them home for the school holidays. This incident is remembered with real intensity, as it is intimately associated with the death of Wordsworth’s father a few days later:

Ere I to school returned
That dreary time, ere I had been ten days
A dweller in my father’s house, he died,
And I and my two brothers, orphans then,
Followed his body to the grave. The event,
With all the sorrow which it brought, appeared
A chastisement; and when I called to mind
That day so lately past, when from the crag
I looked in such anxiety of hope
With trite reflections of morality
Yet in the deepest passion, I bowed low
To God who thus corrected my desires.

(*The Prelude*, XI, 363-374)

In Book Eleven Wordsworth describes ‘spots of time’ as passages in life, particularly those occurring in early childhood in which the mind asserts control over situations that have produced great intensity of feeling: ‘Among those passages of life in which / We had deepest feelings that the mind / Is lord and

master, and the outward sense / Is but the obedient servant of her will' (*The Prelude*, XI, 269-272). The drowned man episode in Book Five fits neatly into Wordsworth's definition. Wordsworth does indeed use his imagination to gain mastery over 'outward sense'. But in relation to the episode in Book Eleven in which Wordsworth and his brothers wait for the horses that will take them home, there seems to be a reluctance to gain mastery over the event. Wordsworth describes his feelings of impatience as he waited for the horses, describing his state of mind as 'feverish, and tired, and restless' (*The Prelude*, XI, 346). The experience of waiting placed him in a liminal space, of being in between places, he felt exposed and alone and these feelings are projected onto the landscape: 'Twas a day / Stormy and rough and wild, and on the grass / I sate half sheltered by a naked wall. / Upon my right hand was a single sheep, / A whistling hawthorn on my left ...' (*The Prelude*, XI, 355-359). We might surmise that Wordsworth harboured some negative feeling for the man (his father) ultimately responsible for arranging the boys' homecoming. These negative feelings come back to haunt him following his father's death and carry the psychological weight of a chastisement. However, crucially Wordsworth does not attempt to justify them, or the righteous indignation that he implies he felt as he waited. Indeed, rather than attempt to rise above the situation, to gain mastery over it, he submits to it, allowing God to 'correct his desires'. At this point we see Wordsworth the orphan, fatherless, motherless and lonely, and facing up to the fact.

This complicates the model of the self that we have identified in which Wordsworth presents his childhood development as relatively autonomous and celebrates his self-sufficiency. Certainly there is ample evidence throughout *The*

Prelude that the dominant model of the self that Wordsworth subscribes to corresponds to the ideology of possessive individualism, but we also have to acknowledge that there is an anxiety attached to *being your own man* that we might relate to the fear of being *left to oneself*. Thus while celebrating his childhood freedom Wordsworth also acknowledges Nature as a spiritual force that is mindful of him and will intervene on his behalf when necessary. The anxiety of being left to oneself persists into adulthood and is countered by his submission to God's will. For as we have seen, for Wordsworth freedom without purpose does not produce a sense of self-possession but of vacancy. In Book Five Wordsworth refuses to accept that children should submit to the authority of self-appointed tutors, refusing to accept that children should relinquish their power and freedom to such men. But the adult Wordsworth fears the consequences of being left to make his way in the world without guidance. We might relate this to the concept of 'orphanhood'. Wordsworth celebration of autonomous growth and the freedom that accompanies it is suggestive of the sensibility of an orphan, but when Wordsworth recognises himself as a literal orphan he admits his need for company and for guidance, as expressed in his poignant address to Coleridge directly following the passage describing his memory of waiting for the horses and his father's burial: 'Thou wilt not languish here, O friend, for whom / I travel in these dim uncertain ways - / Though wilt assist me, as a pilgrim gone / In quest of highest truth.' (*The Prelude*. XI, 389-392). Thus, though Wordsworth's fear of being left alone is capable of producing a reaction against dependency, at other times it produces a heartfelt plea for others to abide with him.

Chapter Five

Is It Man?

Of what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to the mind, when it has once seized on it, like a lichen on the rock.

(*Frankenstein* p.96)

The question of what constitutes a human being has concerned philosophers for centuries. What separates humans from animals? What is the importance of such human attributes as reason and language? What is the significance of humanity's relation to God if we are made in God's image? In Chapter One we discussed the importance of the figure of 'Man' to the Enlightenment project. 'Man' was conceived as a locus of knowledge, and the project of 'Man' was understood in relation to the acquisition of knowledge. In the following discussion I will address the question of what it means to be human in relation to the Creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. My reason for doing this is not simply to decide whether the Creature is a human or not. My answer to this question is an emphatic yes. What I want to examine is the question itself and the ideological assumptions that lie behind it. In order to do this I will focus on the Creature's narrative of his life history that he delivers to Victor Frankenstein from Part Two, Chapter Three onwards of the 1818 edition.

Mary Shelley's account of the Creature's first few days of life has much in common with Rousseau's view of the newborn in *Émile*. Rousseau's newborn has no prior knowledge, but it is capable of learning. All this can be said of Shelley's Creature on becoming conscious for the first time. Both Rousseau and Shelley are echoing an earlier philosopher, John Locke, whose *tabula rasa*

theory of the human subject in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* resulted in a groundbreaking shift away from Cartesian philosophical thought. Descartes, partly as a response to the debate over what distinguishes humans from animals, insisted that humans were born with innate knowledge or principles ‘stamped’ on their mind by God. In contrast Locke insisted that we are born without innate ideas, describing the mind as being like ‘white paper void of all character’ (*Essay* II, I, 2). Locke, Rousseau and Shelley all emphasise the importance of learning to the emergence of human consciousness and understanding. So though we may have lost an innate category of ‘the human’ that exists from birth, all three thinkers provide us with a developmental concept of a human being, in which learning and education come to define what it means to be human. In the following discussion I will focus on the relationship between Locke’s *Essay* and the Creature’s account of his early life in *Frankenstein* in order to put into question fixed conceptions of what it means to be human.

Locke in his *Essay* does not disclaim the concept of innate ideas on purely abstract grounds. He gives empirical evidence to support his case, citing for example the early life of infants:

If we will attentively consider newborn children, we shall have little reason to think that they bring many ideas into the world with them. For bating perhaps some faint ideas of hunger, and thirst, and warmth, and some pains which they may have felt in the womb, there is not the least appearance of any settled ideas at all in them, especially of ideas answering the terms which make up those universal propositions that are esteemed innate principles. One may perceive how, by degrees, afterwards, ideas come into their minds, and that they get no more nor no other than what experience and the observation of things that come in their way furnish them with: which might be enough to satisfy us that they are not original characters stamped on the mind. (*Essay*, I, IV, 2)

The connection between Locke’s *Essay* and Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* appears in some of the similarities in Locke’s account of the genesis of

understanding and Shelley's account of the Creature's early life. Like Locke's newborn, when the Creature describes his early memories, he recalls experiencing warmth, cold, hunger and thirst. It is these early sensations that compel him to action. Another observation Locke makes concerning newborn children is their reaction to light. He describes how babies 'always turn their eyes to that part from whence the light comes, lay them how you please' (*Essay* II, IX, 7). Rousseau makes a similar observation concerning newborn children's sensitivity to light in *Émile*: 'You see his eyes constantly follow the light, and if the light comes from the side the eyes turn towards it, so that one must be careful to turn his head towards the light lest he should squint. He must also be accustomed from the first to the dark, or he will cry if he misses the light' (*Émile*, I, p.34). Notably, in the Creature's account of his first sensory experiences attention is paid to his sensitivity to light and shade:

It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original æra of my being: all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct. A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard, and smelt, at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. By degrees, I remember, a stronger light pressed upon my nerves, so that I was obliged to shut my eyes. Darkness then came over me, and troubled me; but hardly had I felt this, when, by opening my eyes, as I now suppose, the light poured in upon me again. I walked, and, I believe, descended; but I presently found a great alteration in my sensations. Before, dark and opaque bodies had surrounded me, impervious to my touch and sight; but I now found that I could wander on at liberty, with no obstacles which I could not either surmount or avoid. The light became more and more oppressive to me; and, the heat wearying me as I walked, I sought a place where I could receive shade. This was the forest near Ingolstadt; and here I lay by the side of a brook resting from my fatigue, until I felt tormented by hunger and thirst. This roused me from my nearly dormant state, and I ate some berries which I found hanging on the trees, or lying on the ground. I slaked my thirst at the brook; and then lying down, was overcome by sleep.
(*Frankenstein* p.80)

At first the Creature's experiences are confused and indistinct, as he is unable to distinguish one sensation from another. But slowly particular sensations become distinct and unmixed. The Creature describes a period of time marked by shifts in

light and darkness, as night follows day, at the end of which he is able to identify distinct sensations. At this point the speed of his learning appears to accelerate: 'The moon had disappeared from night and again with lessened form, shewed itself, while I remained in the forest. My sensations had, by this time, become distinct, and my mind received every day additional ideas' (*Frankenstein* p.81).

In time the Creature begins to take control of his own 'education'. By reflecting on *ideas in context*, he is able to begin to order his thoughts and so to make use of the flood of sensations he is being subjected to. In this way he is no longer subject to sensation but becomes a subject with sensations that he can manipulate to his own ends. This 'learning curve' can be applied to Locke's theory concerning the development of understanding. In the case of newborn children sensory input is involuntary, but over time the infant's mind becomes more active.

The Creature's ability to direct his own thought processes and make practical use of the knowledge he acquires is illustrated by the episode in which he discovers a fire left by some beggars. Locke in the *Essay* relates the question of innate ideas to the discovery of fire, and again makes reference to children: 'I doubt not but if a colony of young children should be placed in an island where no fire was, they would certainly neither have any notion of such a thing nor name for it...' (*Essay*, I, IV, 2). Locke's reference to a colony of children challenges the notion of collective knowledge. If no individual in a group has experience of something, then that group has no knowledge of it. An individual may communicate his knowledge to others but the foundation of knowledge is in an individual's experience. True to Locke when the Creature first approaches fire, he has no notion of what it is or its dangers, and so, initially attracted by its warmth, puts his hand into it and experiences extreme pain. From this he begins

to gain a notion of cause and effect: 'How strange I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects!' (*Frankenstein* p.81). His understanding of cause and effect is a complex one because it includes the concept of degree. He also deduces that the fire is produced by wood, and proceeds to get more wood from the forest. However, the wood is wet and will not burn, but he discovers that by putting the wood by the fire and drying it out it becomes combustible. Finally by observing the effect of the breeze on the fire he contrives to make a fan out of branches in order to keep the fire going. From this episode we know that the Creature is profoundly intelligent, inquisitive and inventive. At this stage in the narrative the Creature has begun to take control of his own 'education'. He is able to choose 'amongst its ideas, which it will think on' and 'pursue the inquiry of this or that subject' (*Essay* II, VII, 3). He becomes attentive to, and able to direct his own thought processes.

However, this does not mean that the world around him is seen for what it is, but only that he is able to order his senses and so *make sense* of his immediate environment. The perception of a sensation is subjective. Locke makes clear that our ideas do not reside in the objects that produce sensation. The sensations we receive produce a particular kind of awareness, but this awareness is not reality, and cannot claim to fully represent the world beyond the senses. The reality of the world beyond the senses will always be the disordered and nonsensical world we first perceive it to be. Even in adult life we perceive this disordered and nonsensical reality in 'bare naked perception': but we are not *aware* that we perceive it, though we see it whether we want to or not: '... in bare naked perception, the mind is, of the most part, only passive, and what it perceives, it cannot avoid perceiving' (*Essay*, II, IX, 1). To focus on the visual,

‘bare naked perception’, what might be called the image of reality, remains behind the ‘scene’ and without it there is no ‘scene’. So we make order out of reality, but this order does not *reside* in reality. Rather order resides in our awareness, our understanding, of the processes of perception, and the position of the self in relationship to these processes, in ‘*the perception of the operations of our own minds* within us’ (*Essay*, II, I, 4). As we gain control over our thought processes the understanding we acquire becomes second nature to us, and so we confuse it with reality. We believe that what we see is the world as it is, and that knowledge is somehow *out there*. The Creature’s narrative emphasises the involuntary nature of the early stages of learning. In the above extract where the Creature relays his earliest memories he describes how he is ‘seized’ by a ‘multiplicity of sensations’. Similarly, in Locke’s account of a newborn’s first experience of sensation the infant is little more than a passive recipient of sensation indeed sensations force their way into the child’s mind:

But all that are born into the world being surrounded with bodies that perpetually and diversely affect them, variety of ideas, whether care be taken about it or no, are imprinted on the minds of children. Light and colours are busy at hand everywhere when the eye is but open; sounds and some tangible qualities fail not to solicit their proper senses and force an entrance to the mind (*Essay*, II, I, 6)

In Shelley’s account the Creature is forced into being, experiencing a multiplicity of sensations all at once. We might liken its experience to the shock of diving into a freezing cold lake on a hot summer day. The Creature’s response to this early trauma is not one of emotional neutrality: he feels pain. The Creature is ‘oppressed’ by light, ‘tormented’ by hunger and thirst. Life is hellish, and the Creature’s emotional response to it is one of abject despair.

It is important to note that the Creature is telling his story in retrospect, and is without doubt attempting to elicit the sympathy of his listener Victor

Frankenstein by adding emotional details to his narrative. But even in view of this the Creature's account does appear to suggest that he was capable of emotional sensitivity from very early on in his life. For example, the Creature remembers weeping after being compelled to leave Frankenstein's apartment and finding himself with insufficient clothing to keep warm and to protect himself from the dampness of the forest: 'I was a poor helpless miserable wretch; I knew, and could distinguish nothing but, feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept' (*Frankenstein* p.80). At this stage in his development the Creature has no knowledge of self, of his environment, or of his emotions. But though he may not *know* why he is crying until later in his life, he is nevertheless capable of an emotional response to his material circumstances. Clearly, the Creature's narrative is designed to elicit parental feelings from Victor Frankenstein, and to encourage his guilt for the abandonment of his creation when he needed him most. However, the narrative also elicits parental feelings from the reader. As a reader I respond to the Creature as I would to a lost child. As readers we may feel the desire to alleviate the Creature's suffering, and so feel a sense of helplessness at being unable to do so. The Creature's discomfort at being beset on all sides by painful sensations echoes Rousseau description of a newborn baby in Book One of *Émile*:

As man's first state is one of want and weakness, his first sounds are cries and tears. The child feels his needs and cannot satisfy them, he begs for help by his cries. Is he hungry or thirsty? There are tears, is he too cold or too hot? More tears; he needs movement and is kept quiet, more tears; he wants to sleep and is disturbed, he weeps. The less comfortable he is, the more he demands change. He has only one language because he has, so to say, only one kind of discomfort. In the imperfect state of his sense organs he does not distinguish their several impressions; all ills produce one feeling of sorrow. (*Émile*, I, p.37)

In the above passage Rousseau puts the reader into the position of a parent trying to attend to a baby's needs. But of course in Shelley's novel the Creature has no one to look after him and puzzle over how his suffering may be alleviated. *Frankenstein* is a novel very much in the tradition of educational treatises of the eighteenth century. In many ways it responds to the most influential of these works, Rousseau's *Émile*, but it also serves as a critique of it. What Shelley stresses in her novel is that children have a *right* to love and parental affection from birth. By stressing the Creature's suffering Shelley is implicitly criticising the way that educationalists such as Rousseau theorised about the needs of children but failed to attend to these needs in real life. Victor Frankenstein theorises before the birth of the Creature about how a new race of beings will 'bless' him as their creator, but when faced with the being he has created he abandons him and runs away from his responsibilities. Similarly Rousseau's abandonment of his own children didn't prevent him from demanding the gratitude of his fictional protégé at the end of *Émile*. As James O'Rourke points out, Mary Shelley was acutely aware of what she describes as Rousseau's criminal act, and went so far as to speculate upon the possible fate of Rousseau's children in an entry she made in Dionysius Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*: 'Five of his children were thus sent to a receptacle where few survive; and those who do go through life are brutified by their situation, or depressed by the burden, ever weighing at the heart, that they have not inherited the commonest right of humanity, a parent's care'.⁹⁶ We can draw a clear parallel here with the Creature who is both brutalised and weighed down by the psychological burden of his

⁹⁶ Mary Shelley, 'Rousseau' in *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings*, vol. 3, *French Lives (Molière to Madame de Staël)*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (London: Pickering and Chatto 2002), p.334. For a discussion of Shelley's response to Rousseau's act of abandonment see James O'Rourke, "'Nothing more Unnatural': Mary Shelley's Revision of Rousseau", *ELH*, vol. 56 (1989), pp. 543-569.

abandonment. But unlike Rousseau's children, who Shelley rightly observes would have probably died in infancy, the Creature manages to survive against the odds, and lives to tell his tale. Mary Shelley's novel poses the question: what if an abandoned child was able to remember the pain and desperation that accompanied its abandonment? Both Rousseau and Locke treat children in earliest infancy as little more than a bundle of sensations, as yet unable to remember, or 'read' into the experiences that are happening to them. Mary Shelley risks accusation of implausibility by having her child remember everything. Moreover, again perhaps a little clumsily, she provides the Creature with the knowledge, contained in its portmanteau, which will allow him to point the finger of blame at his creator. In doing this she challenges the adult assumption that children don't bear grudges or that they simply won't remember what is done to them. Mary Shelley's child neither forgives nor forgets. She rejects mechanistic concepts of child development, and instead insists on the importance of children's emotional responses to the experiences they are going through. Moreover she reveals how neglect in childhood can shape personality, informing the sufferer's sense of who they are.

Mary Shelley stresses the humanity of children by stressing the importance of childhood memory. The traumatic experiences of the Creature leave emotional imprints on his mind. These imprints are not imbued with significance at the time of their occurrence but are imbued with meaning retrospectively. For the Creature they function as key co-ordinates around which he can weave his narrative.

The act of narration is clearly a creative act. The Creature remembers his early life with 'considerable difficulty'. The story he tells involves him giving a

narrative order to disordered sensory information, so that he might produce a narrative of the self that is meaningful to him. He then retells his story to a listener, and we must assume from this that he alters his story in response to his audience. So the Creature's narrative builds upon a number of narrative layers, but the foundation of these layers of narration are the imprints left by his emotional responses to sensory experiences.

The Creature's narrative allows him to give temporal order to his life. He is able to recollect and retell the series of events that led him to the position he now finds himself in. But this order is imposed. The trauma that accompanies his first entrance into life is never overcome. Moreover, the trauma is heightened by the fact that he realises, again retrospectively, how utterly alone he was when he was most in need of support.

To live life, the existential experience of being, and to narrate life, are two very different things. The Creature's narrative provides him with a figure, himself, that he can identify with, and sympathise with. The self becomes 'other' over time. This temporal gap produces a division between the present and past selves; this division allows the Creature to develop an emotional intimacy towards its past 'self'. Memory in this instant is a kind of self-nurture - a form of caress. The Creature has a tremendous personal investment in the narrative he delivers. He has a psychic dependence on it that is equivalent in intensity to a child's relationship with its parent. He takes on the parental role when looking back at his past self. The recognition in the present of how alone and in need of aid he was in the past is the closest he comes to experiencing parental concern. However, the Creature's temporal location of himself is problematic. He may have begun life like a 'blank sheet of paper', but there is no reason to believe that

he is capable of relaying every experience he has had since birth as if he is reading from an inscribed sheet containing all that has happened to him. The Creature is caught in a loop of self-reflection in an attempt to contain himself 'in totality' within the confines of his narrative. The Creature, as an alienated individual, throws himself back onto himself, constantly remembering past experiences and events, in a desperate attempt to hold himself together.

Locke makes clear in his account of the function of memory, that memories in early childhood are lost to adult life: 'leaving no more footsteps or remaining characters of themselves than shadows do flying over fields of corn' (*Essay* II, X, 4). The grand moment of self-recognition that characterises so much of philosophical thinking on subjectivity is absent from Locke's thinking. In Locke human consciousness is ongoing and expansive; it expands with our experience. In this context it would be wrong to think of the self in terms of the subject's reflection on a totality that it comes to recognise as 'itself'. The ability to reflect is not the crowning achievement of consciousness. Indeed our ability to reflect is founded upon sensory experience. In Locke's schema reflection is not so distinct from the five senses. Locke describes it as a kind of sixth sense, referring to it as an internal sense:

This source of ideas every man has wholly in himself; and though it be not sense, as having nothing to do with external objects, yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be called internal sense. But as I call the other sensation, so I call this REFLECTION, the ideas it affords being such only as the mind gets by reflecting on its own operations within itself. By REFLECTION then ... I would be understood to mean that notice which the mind takes of its own operations, and the manner of them, by reason whereof there come to be ideas of these operations in the understanding. (*Essay*, II, I, 4)

The self, if it must be defined, is a composite of mental processes and operations. But these processes and operations never achieve temporal closure.

There is a gap in time between our experience of sensation and our reflection on it, and though this gap may be as short as the space between ideas, it nevertheless means that the articulation of the ‘I am’ is always an echo of something that went before.

In early infancy the act of reflection is not something we can control or contain. Indeed even as adults we cannot fully control it, though we can impose some order on it. Rather we reflect whether we will it or not. In this context, the self-act, the articulation of the ‘I am’, is one act of reflection in a sea of sensations and reflections that go on for as long as we are conscious:

In this part the understanding is merely passive; and whether or no it will have these beginnings and, as it were, materials of knowledge, is not in its own power. For the objects of our senses do, many of them, obtrude their particular ideas upon our minds whether we will or no; and the operations of our minds will not let us be without, at least, some obscure notions of them. (Essay, II, I, 25)

So though in adulthood our minds are active, and to a great extent we are able to direct our thoughts, we cannot *stop* our thoughts. Moreover, it is this flow of ideas in the mind that allows us to experience the sensation of *being*:

For whilst we are thinking or whilst we receive successively several ideas in our minds, we know that we do exist; and so we call the existence of ourselves, or anything else commensurate to the succession of any ideas in our minds, the duration of ourselves or any such other thing co-existing with our thinking’. (Essay, II, XIV, 3)

The knowledge we have of ‘the duration of ourselves’ is not a totalised knowledge spanning from the beginning of our existence to the present time. Rather it is the product of the experience of duration – of being over time. The discrepancy between the time it takes to tell a story and the time it took to live that story, reveals the huge gap between existence and the memory of having

existed. If we tell another the story of our life, as the Creature attempts to, we are forced to work within the temporal confines imposed by narration; we are constrained by the time it takes to recall and retell. Life is more than the *sense of self*; it allows for this sensation but it is not this sensation. In Locke a distinction is made between the self or selves, as objects of personal history, and personal identity:

But that which seems to make the difficulty is this: that this consciousness being interrupted always by forgetfulness, there being no moment of our lives wherein we have the whole train of all our past actions before our eyes in one view, but even the best memories losing the sight of one part whilst they are viewing another; and we sometimes, and that the greatest part of our lives, not reflecting on our past selves, being intent on our present thought, and in sound sleep having no thought at all, or at least none with that consciousness which remarks our waking thoughts; I say, in all these cases, our consciousness being interrupted, and we losing the sight of our past selves, doubts are raised whether we are the same thinking thing, i.e. the same substance or no. Which, however reasonable or unreasonable, concerns not personal identity at all: the question being what makes the same person, and not whether it be the same identical substance, which always thinks in the same person; which, in this case, matters not at all: different substances, by the same consciousness (where they do partake in it) being united into one person, as well as different bodies by the same life are united into one animal, whose identity is preserved in that change of substance by the unity of one continued life. (Essay, II, XXVII, 10)

Consciousness provides the self with an identity – a sense of sameness over time. But consciousness is not continuous, as it is open to interruptions such as when we are asleep, and inconsistencies, such as lapses in memory. However, when we return to consciousness, for example after sleep, we do not begin again, rather something of the self is carried forward. Michael Ayer's writing on Locke describes the link between conscious states as the 'intentionality of its successive states'.⁹⁷ Intentionality can be linked to time-consciousness and the self's ability to achieve temporal orientation – where I have been, where I am, where I am going. The experience of being conscious provides us with a measure by which

⁹⁷ Michael Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology*, vol.2 (London: Routledge 1996), p.265

we can identify ourselves. We can reflect upon the experience of being conscious and see it as an experience common to our individual life. But reflection is always a backward glance, and so cannot achieve temporal closure. Consciousness goes on during the moment of reflection, as does life, and is not contained in the instant of reflection.

Life, perhaps more than consciousness, may appear to provide us with a stable continuum within which the self can be located. Indeed life appears to extend beyond the materiality of the body. As Locke makes clear in the above extract, the body may undergo substantial changes over time but what unites it is 'one continuous life'. In the human lifecycle, for example, we change from a child into an adult, and even in adulthood the body undergoes substantial changes through the aging process. In relation to corporeality there is no synchronic moment that we can dissect in which the body achieves a substantial material unity.

The fact that the body can undergo substantial change while containing the same life relates to *Frankenstein*. The Creature is comprised of a collection of body parts. Some of these body parts would have been vital to the person they previously belonged to. But what is their status after the death of that person? Should they be regarded as dead matter, or as 'belonging' to their original owner even though their original owner is no longer alive? Does their status change when they become part of another living being, in this case the Creature?⁹⁸ One answer, and the one that I would subscribe to, is to regard body parts in relation to their contribution to the life of the person they are attached to at a particular

⁹⁸ Michael Ayer's discusses some of these issues in the context of Locke's *Essay* relating them to contemporary medical practices such as amputation and transplantation. *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology*, vol.2 (London: Routledge 1996), p.224-225.

time. In this sense the body is no more than the sum of its parts. However, it is important to stress that life cannot exist without some form of body. So what we might say, then, is that life is produced by the sum of body parts, and their organisation within an individual organism. But life also brings a unity to this organisation and contributes to the continuation of the body as a living structure.

To return to the question of what makes us human. Clearly any definition of the human cannot be reduced to a question of material substance. Neither can it be reduced to questions of the form that bodily matter takes. This is not to say that as beings we are not spatially confined. Though it is problematic to put spatial boundaries on the self in terms of bodily contours, it is also obvious that the human subject is not spatially diffuse. But the spatial and temporal confinement of the human subject should not be confused with issues of form and physical definition. So far in our discussion of the Creature's early life there has been nothing that would exclude him from the title of human. We are left then with the issue of the Creature's form. It is interesting to consider whether John Locke would have regarded the Creature of Shelley's novel as human or not. Certainly, as a Christian Locke may well have had major objections to a Creature made by a man being regarded as human. Nevertheless, what I think we can assume is that Locke would not have excluded the Creature from humanity on the grounds of its form.

In Book Three, Chapter Seven, of the *Essay* Locke discusses the issue of how we define the 'species' man. Unusually for Locke he becomes quite anecdotal in his discussion of this issue. At one point Locke retells a story by a Monsieur Menage about the Abbot of St Martin. The Abbot was born deformed, and the extent of his deformity led to questions being raised as to whether he

should be baptised or not. Baptism in this instant can be seen as conferring on the baptised the stamp of the human, as well as initiating children into Christian fellowship:

When the Abbot of St Martins ... was born he had so little of the figure of a man that it bespoke him rather a monster. It was for some time under deliberation whether he should be baptized or no. However, he was baptised and declared a man provisionally (till time should show what he would prove). Nature had moulded him so untowardly that he was called all his life the Abbot Malotru, i.e. ill-shaped ... This child we see was very near being excluded out of the species of man, barely by his shape. He escaped very narrowly as he was; and, it is certain, a figure a little more oddly had cast him, and he had been executed as a thing not to be allowed to pass for a man. And yet there can be no reason given why, if the lineament of his face had been a little altered, a rational soul could not have been lodged in him; why a visage somewhat longer, or a nose flatter, or a wider mouth could not have consisted, as well as the rest of his figure, with such a soul, such parts as made him, disfigured as he was, capable to be a dignitary in the church. (Essay, III, VI, 26)

In this passage, again unusually for Locke, there does appear to be an element of humour, we might even say satire. The idea of making judgements about what constitutes a man purely on the grounds of physical form is shown to be absurd. How can a judgement that can result in the life or death of someone be decided on issues relating to the extent of that person's deformity with a council of men deliberating over the flatness of a child's nose or the width of its mouth. The eventual decision to baptise him and make him a man 'provisionally' is also absurd in its legalistic attempt to find a compromise. Locke seems to be asking, though not explicitly, what right have these men to cast judgement on this child?⁹⁹ Similarly Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* can be seen to address the same question - what right have we to judge whether the

⁹⁹ Locke goes on to discuss this question in relation to hypothetical beings with fantastic forms: 'Who would undertake to resolve what *species* that monster was of which is mentioned by *Licetus*, with a man's head and hogs body? Or those other which to the bodies of men had the heads of beasts, as dogs, horses, etc. If any of these creatures had lived and could have spoke, it would have increased the difficulty. Had the upper part to the middle been of human shape, and all below swine, had it been murder to destroy it? Or must the bishop have been consulted whether it were man enough to be admitted to the font or no? (Essay, III, VI, 27)

Creature is human or not? Indeed we may conclude that this act of 'judgement' is self-referential, for implicit in the question 'is it man' is the declaration 'I am man'.

The idea of man having a fixed form would have been further complicated for Mary Shelley by her reading of Rousseau's *Second Discourse*. The parallel between the Creature and Rousseau's natural man, which has been much commented on, helps to explain the difference in form between the Creature and modern man.¹⁰⁰ Using this model, in Victor Frankenstein's creation we see not so much the construction of a 'deformed' man, but the excavation, or rather reconstruction of the original man. In the *Second Discourse* Rousseau accepts that there would have been 'successive changes in the constitution of man', taking place over thousands of years, that would have physically distinguish natural man from civilised man.¹⁰¹ These changes are the result of human beings' adaptation to their environment, for example, as natural man 'applied his limbs to new uses, and fed himself on new kinds of food' his constitution would have slowly changed in order to conform to the physical

¹⁰⁰ See Paul A. Cantor, *Creature and Creator: Myth-making and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984), p.119-122; David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1988) p.183-184; Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Myth Her Monsters* (London: Routledge 1988) p.47-50; James O'Rourke, "'Nothing More Unnatural': Mary Shelley's Revision of Rousseau", *ELH*, vol.56 (1989), p.543-569; Alan Richardson 'From Émile to Frankenstein: The Education of Monsters', *European Romantic Review*, vol. 2 (1991) p.147-162.

¹⁰¹ The idea that some form of physical mutation had occurred in human beings was gaining in respectability from the mid eighteenth century onwards. For example Pierre Maupertuis, President of the Berlin Academy, believed that mutations had occurred in nature in general, and made racial differences in human beings a particular focus for his studies. See P.J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, *The Great Map of Mankind: British Perception of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons 1982), p.244. Comte de Buffon in his *Natural History, General and Particular*, also suggested that changes in the human constitution were the result of environmental adaption: 'Mankind are not composed of species essentially different from each other; that, on the contrary, there was originally but one species, who, after multiplying and spreading over the whole surface of the earth, have undergone various changes by the influence of climate, food, mode of living, epidemic diseases, and the mixture of dissimilar individuals' (quoted in *The Great Map of Mankind* pp.244-245).

demands being made upon it (*Second Discourse* p.52). The more human beings co-operated and formed social bonds and cultural structures, the more control they had over their environment. Thus in time human beings' physical constitutions would adapt to an environment that was largely of their own making. This would have resulted in a decisive difference in the physical constitutions of civilised man and his savage predecessor. Rousseau, while accepting that significant changes had taken place in humanity's physical constitution, refuses to speculate upon whether, for example, natural man was covered from head to foot in hair, or had long talons, or walked on all fours, claiming that on these issues he could 'form none but vague and imaginary conjectures' (*Second Discourse* p.52). To get round this, and for arguments sake, Rousseau chooses to regard the human body as having always been as it is now (*Second Discourse* p.52). But though Rousseau refuses to engage in vague imaginings about the appearance of the original man, his very refusal may have encouraged curious readers to engage in such speculations for themselves, and one of these readers may well have been Mary Shelley.

Frankenstein, if read in the context of the *Second Discourse*, is a novel about humanity's inability to recognise who we are in what we were. The Creature's form is perceived in relation to the idealism that is attached to the human form by a particular culture at a particular time in history. In the case of the Creature his perceived deformity does not prevent him from being stronger, more agile and more physically robust than modern man (all attributes that support the idea that he does indeed represents pre-civilised man). He is excluded from society for one reason alone – his form does not fit into enlightened Europe's aesthetic register. David Marshall, who relates the thinking

of Rousseau to Mary Shelley, picks up on the theme of communal modes of seeing and what we might term the tribalism of perception. He remarks on a section from Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Language* that has particular relevance to *Frankenstein*. Rousseau depicts a time in which primitive man was so cocooned in the social cell of the family that he was unable to regard those outside his tribe as fellow men:

Never having seen anything beyond their own immediate milieu, they did not even understand that; they did not understand themselves. They had the concept of a father, a son, a brother, but not that of a man. Their hut contained all of their fellow men. Stranger, beast, monster: these were all one to them. Apart from themselves and their family, the whole universe would count as nothing to them.¹⁰²

As David Marshall points out Mary Shelley appears to complicate Rousseau's theory of tribal kinship. It is the Creature, the embodiment of the *homme sauvage*, who is able to feel sympathy and identify with the cottagers, whereas the 'civilised' cottagers cannot include him in their idea of man. Marshall goes on to point out that the cottagers and Victor Frankenstein's inability to recognise the Creature might be put down to their faulty vision. What they refuse to see in the Creature is his resemblance to them. His deformity is what horrifies; if he was of an entirely different form the fear he inspired would be of a wholly different nature. Marshall comments: '*Frankenstein* ... suggests that people might regard the monster as a monster precisely because they perceive his resemblance; they might refuse to recognise him as a man, a human creature, precisely because they apprehend the extent to which this monster *is* the figure of a man'.¹⁰³ What the Creature's deformity reveals is that the concept of idealised form is a cultural product that arises with

¹⁰² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Language* in *On the Origin of Language*, trans. John H Moran and Alexander Gode (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986) p.33

¹⁰³ *ibid*, p.208.

the development of social formations whose kinship is in part founded upon a shared aesthetic ideology.

In the above discussion I have tended to prioritise time over space in relation to the question of what constitutes a human being. I have stressed Locke's emphasis on being over time in relation to life and consciousness, and Rousseau's and Mary Shelley's refusal of an idealist model that suggests that the human form transcends historical transformation. I have done this in order to put into question the idea that humans have a standardised material form. However, in doing this I am not proposing that the self is somehow disembodied. Indeed in the case of *Frankenstein* the Creature's misery is the result of his being trapped within a body that others find hideous.

From our earlier discussion of the learning process, we know that Locke stresses the importance of sensory experience to the acquisition of ideas. Sensory experience cannot be separated from bodily experience. In Shelley's account of the Creature the accumulation of sensory information allows him to navigate his way through the forest. In *Frankenstein* as in Rousseau's *Émile*, sensory awareness and spatial awareness develop together. Sensory experience, though often taken for granted, significantly contributes to the experience of living and to our conception of the self.

Our awareness of our bodies tends to increase when we experience an intense sensation. For example, if a person became seriously ill and experienced intense physical pain, then the experience of such pain would transform, perhaps even come to define that person's experience of living. If the pain became unbearable then it might even induce that person to want to end their life. The experience of such pain can alter an individual's consciousness of the passage of

time. The duration of the pain would come to signify that person's continued existence.

The experience of pain characterises the Creature's life in *Frankenstein*. The pain the Creature experience is emotional pain. Such intense emotional pain is not so different from physical pain, and can indeed come to define the temporal experience of living. In this way the Creature's experience of emotional pain can be linked to his self-awareness. His knowledge that he has suffered and is suffering, and is set to go on suffering in the future is another illustration of his humanity. Human beings' awareness that their emotional outlook is unique to them and informed by their life experiences informs their sense of individuality. But this awareness can also produce as sense of emotional isolation, of being locked inside one's own mind. Mary Shelley makes an important epistemological distinction between two types of knowledge, one objective the other subjective. The objective form of knowledge is Lockean in nature and is founded on sensation and instinctual drives. The Creature becomes increasingly nostalgic for this limited form of knowledge: 'Oh that I had for ever remained in my native wood, nor known or felt beyond the sensation of hunger, thirst, and heat!' (*Frankenstein* p.96). To have feelings beyond the duration of a particular sensation, to feel for oneself as the subject of experience, involves a far more subjective, a far more human form of knowledge. As his narrative progresses it is clear that the Creature begins to feel for himself, but most importantly he cannot disentangle himself from the feelings he is having, feelings that increasingly come to dominate his entire outlook on life. Unable to disconnect the knowledge he has acquired from his emotional outlook, the Creature contemplates suicide as a means of alleviating his pain: 'I wished

sometimes to shake off all thought and feeling; but I learned that there was but one means to overcome the sensation of pain, and that was death – a state that I feared yet did not understand’ (*Frankenstein* pp.96-97). In a strange way the Creature’s lack of understanding, his sense of the unknowable, yet again marks him out as human. For Mary Shelley a person’s humanity is not only understood in terms of self-determination – the autonomous individual making his way in the world – but by the human capacity to be aware that we are not in total control of our thoughts and feelings, that things go on within and without us whether we will it or not.

The Creature’s pain increases with his developing knowledge of his circumstances. The Creature cannot stop thinking. He cannot stop the endless succession of his thoughts, and the constant expansion of his understanding and knowledge. In *Frankenstein* knowledge is something inescapable. *Frankenstein* is in many ways a book concerning the inability of the human subject to remain ignorant. We are ‘educated’ whether we want to be or not, as we cannot close ourselves off to sensation and reflection. If we were to paraphrase the Creature’s lament it might go something like this: ‘I did not ask to be given life and yet I am compelled to live, and the more I live the more I learn, though the knowledge I acquire is painful to me’. The Creature’s ‘educational’ experience could not be more different from that of his creator Victor Frankenstein. Learning for the young Frankenstein is a pleasurable pursuit. His aim in life is to push forward the boundaries of human knowledge. He is the very model of the enlightened subject, whom Adorno and Horkheimer describe as projecting the subjective

onto nature.¹⁰⁴ The reply to the Sphinx's riddle is taken to its ultimate conclusion in Mary Shelley's novel with Frankenstein's creation of a human being. But Frankenstein's 'creation' cannot be contained in the field of knowledge that Frankenstein inhabits because he does not fit into the mould of 'Man'. Alienated from the model of knowledge offered by the Enlightenment the Creature develops an independent understanding of what it means to be alive, and what it means to be human. In the Creature we have the figure of the human existing outside the ideology of the human.

¹⁰⁴ Adorno, Theodor W. and Horkheimer, Max. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso 1997), p.7.

Chapter Six

Alienation in Language

Part One

The first part of this Chapter explores Rousseau's beliefs concerning children's language development in *Émile*, and the influence of John Locke's philosophy of language on Rousseau's thinking. What I want to emphasise is the anxiety that Rousseau and Locke felt when confronted with the relationship between language and socialisation, and how they downplay it in their writing. In the second half of the Chapter I shall turn my attention to Mary Shelley and to the episode in *Frankenstein* in which the Creature acquires language. Mary Shelley was acquainted with the writings of many of those who influenced the Enlightenment including Rousseau and Locke. However, unlike these two philosophers Mary Shelley addresses the relationship between language development and socialisation head on. In doing so she comes close to revealing why this issue caused such anxiety for her philosophical predecessors.

In Chapter One the concept of negative education was established as being key to understanding Rousseau's pedagogy. Rousseau's espousal of negative education also applies to his theory of the rate at which a child's language should develop. The child should not be 'taught' to speak in a formal fashion, and the pace of his development should not be forced or prematurely hastened. Rousseau places no order on a child's language development but he does place restrictions on it: 'Let the child's vocabulary, therefore, be limited; it is very undesirable that he should have more words than ideas, that he should be able to say more than he

thinks' (*Émile*, I, p.47). Rousseau's demand that as close a relationship as possible exists between distinct ideas and the verbal signifiers that they refer to, echoes the language theory of John Locke.

In Book Three of the *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 'Of Words', Locke puts forward a theory of language that views words as signifiers of ideas. This is important, because Locke disassociates himself from the then commonly held view that words stand for things. When Adam in 'Genesis' named the objects around him the orthodoxy demands that the first names were divinely sanctioned. Locke at the very least comes from a post-Babel perspective. Locke stresses that the relationship between an idea and the word that signifies that idea is an arbitrary relationship.

Thus we may conceive how *words*, which were by nature so well adapted to that purpose, come to be made use of by men as *the sign of their ideas*: not by any natural connexion that there is between particular articulate sounds and certain *ideas*, for then there would be but one language amongst all men; but by a voluntary imposition whereby such a word is made arbitrarily the mark of such an *idea*. The use, then, of words is to be sensible marks of *ideas*, and the *ideas* they stand for are their proper and immediate signification. (*Essay*, III, II, 1)

Following Ferdinand de Saussure, the view that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary has become well established. But Locke's much earlier conception of the arbitrary nature of this relationship has some added complications. Locke emphasises the subjective nature of language. A word refers to an idea in an individual's mind: '*words, in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing but the ideas in the mind of him that uses them*' (*Essay* III, II, 2). Using a Lockean model of language we cannot assume that the word we are using to signify an idea in our own mind will necessarily signify the same idea in the mind of another. Thus the limits of

language are the limits of an individual's acquired knowledge. Locke insists that we only use words that are attached to clear ideas in our minds. If we use a word that is not attached to a distinct idea, then that word signifies nothing: 'But so far as words are of use and signification, so far is there a constant connexion between the sounds and the idea, and a designation that the one stand for the other: without which application of them, they are nothing but so much insignificant noise' (*Essay*, III, II, 7).

Communication for Locke should be a means of conveying ideas from one individual to another. Locke considers the '[t]rue end of speech: to be the easiest and shortest way of communicating our notions' (*Essay* III, VI, 33). Clearly it is impossible that the same idea be implanted from one mind to another, but a word must 'excite' in the hearer the same idea as the one in the mind of the speaker. For this to happen the person being spoken to must have arrived at the same idea independently, through his own experience. in order that the idea being communicated might be brought to mind.

For Locke words are the final link in a chain beginning with sensation. Simple ideas reflect upon distinct sensations. When these ideas are articulated in the form of words there is an opportunity for distortion to take place, and when we attempt to communicate our ideas to someone else, there is yet another opportunity for misunderstanding. Verbal communication then is a kind of 'Chinese Whispers'.

For Locke language is a tool for the conveyance of ideas, and he is adamant that this tool should not be misused. Locke clearly has misgivings about the 'imperfection that is naturally in language, and the obscurity and confusion that is so hard to be avoided in use of words', but he also chastises

those who ‘wilfully’ misuse language (*Essay*, III, X, I). Locke identifies as crimes against knowledge: mistaking words for the things they stand for, using words without knowing what they mean and, worse still, using words without anything being signified at all (*Essay*, III, X, 2; III, X, 4). Locke chastises those who misuse language, attacking those who pick up words from their neighbours that they don’t fully understand, only to spread them around their neighbourhood so that their meaning becomes obscure: ‘Men take words they find in use amongst their neighbours, and that they may not seem ignorant what they stand for, use them confidently without much troubling their heads about a certain fixed meaning...’ (*Essay*, III, X, 4). Again, Locke is anxious about what we might call the ‘Chinese Whispers’ effect.

What Locke ignores is the relationship between language and community, and the way that particular localised groups form their own modes of speech, both in terms of dialect and vocabulary. It stands to reason that localised speech patterns emerge through cultural dialogue, and this complicates Locke’s model of words standing for ideas within the minds of particular individuals. At points in his argument Locke appears to advocate the standardisation of language. He uses a metaphor of language as the conduit through which knowledge is spread. The image Locke constructs is suggestive of a Roman aqueduct. These imperialist connotations are further heightened by the image of linguistic vandals, ‘enemies of knowledge’, breaking the pipes through which knowledge flows:

For language being the great conduit whereby men convey their discoveries, reasoning, and knowledge from one to another, he that makes an ill use of it, though he does not corrupt the fountains of knowledge which are in things themselves, yet he does, as much as in him lies, break or stop the pipes whereby it is distributed to the public use and advantage of mankind. He that uses words

without any clear and steady meaning, what does he but lead himself and others into error? And he that designedly does it ought to be looked on as an enemy of truth and knowledge. (Essay. III, XI, 5)

Rousseau's opinion that it is undesirable that a child 'should have more words than ideas' has clearly been influenced by Locke's theory of the ideational basis of language. However, unlike Locke, Rousseau does not view expressive sounds as useless or 'empty'. He would not, for example, chastise a child who produces sounds that are not attached to ideas. In a telling passage Rousseau draws a distinction between natural and artificial language. Artificial language - the fixed modes of speech and signification that allow us to communicate with one another - is a historical construct that has developed over time along with culture and civilisation. Natural language, in contrast, is an expressive form of communication that includes gesture, emotional cries and facial expressions. For an example of natural language Rousseau suggests we need look no further than the communion that exist between an infant and its nurse:

All our languages are the result of art. It has long been a subject of inquiry whether there ever was a natural language common to all; no doubt there is, and it is the language of children before they begin to speak. This language is inarticulate, but it has tone, stress and meaning. The use of our own language has led us to neglect it so far as to forget it altogether. Let us study children and we shall soon learn it again from them. Nurses can teach us this language; they understand all their nurslings say to them, they answer them, and keep up long conversations with them; and though they use words, these words are quite useless. It is not the hearing of the word, but its accompanying intonation that is understood.

To the language of intonation is added the no less forcible language of gesture. The child uses, not its weak hands, but its face. The amount of expression in these undeveloped faces is extraordinary; their features change from one moment to another with incredible speed. You see smiles, desires, terror, come and go like lighting; every time the face seems different. The muscles of the face are undoubtedly more mobile than our own. On the other hand the eyes are almost expressionless. Such must be the sort of signs they use at an age when their only needs are those of the body. Grimaces are the signs of sensation, the glance expresses sentiment. (*Émile*, I, pp. 36-37)

So, natural language may be a language lost to adulthood, but it does have the status of a universal and originary language. For Rousseau the function of language is not only the conveyance of ideas. The acoustic dimension of language, for example verbal shifts in tone and emphasis, are an important means of expressing emotions. Rousseau genders natural language as feminine and infantile, but both these terms have positive connotations for him.

Rousseau's description of natural language has some interesting parallels with Julia Kristeva's description of the semiotic.¹⁰⁵ Kristeva, working with and against a Lacanian model of language, designates the semiotic as a pre-Oedipal language that occurs before the division of subject and object and the arbitrary division of signifier and signified that accompanies an individual's entrance into the symbolic order. The symbolic order regulates signifying practice and cultural exchange by imposing order and structure on all forms of social discourse. However, Kristeva stresses the importance of the pre-Oedipal, pre-symbolic bond between mother and child. The semiotic involves a form of bodily communion between the child and its mother. The as yet undirected polymorphous drives of the infant find expression in sound, rhythm and impulsive movements – a pre-symbolic language. Rousseau's reverence for natural language clearly involves a sense of awe for the bond between a child and its nurse that occurs before the development of spoken language.

The type of communication that goes on between infant and nurse involves mimesis as sounds, gestures and expression are mimicked and echoed from one to the other. Interestingly, Rousseau describes the child's mind, before it has

¹⁰⁵ See Julia Kristeva's 'Revolution in Poetic Language' in *The Kristeva Reader* ed. Toril Moi. (Oxford Blackwell 1986); 'Is Sensation a Language?' trans. John Lechte in *Writing and Psychoanalysis: A Reader*, ed. John Lechte (London: Arnold 1996). For criticism of Kristeva see Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin 1989); John Lechte, *Julia Kristeva* (London: Routledge 1990).

developed speech, as functioning like a mirror: 'Their shining, polished brain reflects, as in a mirror, the things you show them, but nothing sinks in. The child remembers the words and the ideas are reflected back: his hearers understand them, but to him they are meaningless' (*Émile*, II, p.85). In Rousseau's model the child can echo back the words he has been taught, but these words do not sink beneath the reflective surface of his mind and attach themselves to ideas. What then is being communicated between nurse and infant? Does the child recognise itself and/or its nurse as distinct contributors to a dialogue or are its utterances and gestures merely reflexive?

A comparison can again be drawn with Kristeva. The transitional period between the semiotic and the symbolic involves a process of subject formation. The symbiotic bond between mother and child is not a period of stasis. Interaction between mother and child involves a certain level of recognition and response. For example, a child responds to the facial expressions of its mother, to the sound of her voice, to her touch. The child's interaction with the mother can be related to the Lacanian conception of the mirror stage, with the mother acting as mirror to the child. Over time through its bodily interaction with the mother, and through the recognition of its own body/image the child comes to recognise itself as a unified body distinct from its mother. So from a Kristevan perspective we might say that the relationship that Rousseau describes as existing between a nurse and her infant takes place at a time when the infant is not fully able to distinguish itself from its 'mother'.

Rousseau's relationship with his pupil can at times seem to parallel the strong physical bond that exists between a mother and child. In an extraordinary passage Rousseau reveals something of his psychic investment in Émile. He

describes how writing about Émile's early bodily sensations and experiences makes him feel physically close to his pupil. It is as if Émile's blood is pulsing through Rousseau veins:

[W]hen I think of a child of ten or twelve, strong . healthy, well grown for his age, only pleasant thoughts are called up... I see him keen, eager, and full of life, free from gnawing cares and painful forebodings, absorbed in this present state, and delighting in a fullness of life which seems to extend beyond himself ... I watch the child with delight ... His eager life seems to stir my own pulses, I seem to live his life and in his vigour I renew my own (*Émile*, II, p.146-147).

The final image in this passage is parasitic. Through his imagination Rousseau is able to feed off the blood of his creation. But it is also clear from this image that Rousseau's body contains Émile – it is an image of pregnancy. Rousseau is caught in a moment of symbiotic union with Émile. It is a moment out of time as Rousseau becomes lost in the temporality of childhood – 'absorbed in this present state'. Larry Wolff comments on the erotic nature of Rousseau's relationship to Émile as revealed in this passage: 'With the building of an almost erotic tension in Rousseau's contemplation, as his own blood warmed in response to the ardent blood of the child, the consummation came with the possessive ecstasy of metamorphosis. Rousseau became the child Émile, became young again'.¹⁰⁶ But this ecstatic moment is broken in the following paragraph with the intervention of a third term in the figure of a 'stern angry man'. The dream becomes a nightmare as the temporality of childhood is invaded by the chiming of a clock:

The hour strikes, the scene is changed. All of a sudden his eye grows dim, his mirth has fled. Farewell mirth, farewell untrammelled sports in which he delighted. A stern, angry man takes him by the hand, saying gravely, 'come with

¹⁰⁶ Larry Wolff, 'When I Imagine a Child: The Idea of Childhood and the Philosophy of Memory in the Enlightenment', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 31, no.4 (1998) Pp. 377-401.

me, sir,' and he is led away. As they are entering the room, I catch a glimpse of books. Books, what dull food for a child of his age! The poor child allows himself to be dragged away; he casts a sorrowful look on all about him, and departs in silence, his eyes swollen with tears he dare not shed, and his heart bursting with sighs he dare not utter. (*Émile*, II p.147)

Rousseau's fantasy is transformed, moving from a dyadic structure, the fantasy of a symbiotic relationship between adult and child, to a triadic structure, with the intervention of a schoolmaster who leads Émile away to a classroom. We can associate the schoolmaster with the intervention of the symbolic order. The books he is leading Émile to will teach him to conform to the laws that govern signification. The space of the classroom will regulate his time, and enforce strict codes of behaviour. The move into the classroom is an inward move, both spatially and psychically. Émile is transformed from a boy whose life is so full 'it extends beyond himself', to a boy who must stifle his emotions by suppressing his tears, and by repressing his previously 'untrammelled' desires. The final image is one of total submission as 'the poor child allows himself to be dragged away'.

It is tempting to see the stern angry man as a symbolic father intervening in a pre-Oedipal bond. But it is important to note that the scenario is an all male fantasy and there is a notable absence of a mother figure. As has been said, Rousseau's relationship to his pupil clearly *parallels* the relationship between mother and child. However, while recognising this parallel the absence of the maternal should not be brushed over, nor should the homosocial nature of the fantasy be ignored.

In order to understand some of these issues it is useful to return to Rousseau's pedagogical programme in Book Two of *Émile*. Rousseau places heavy stress on the need to train the five senses. He goes through each sense one

by one devising methods by which it might be developed and refined. Again, Rousseau's role parallels that of the pre-Oedipal mother whose physical interaction with her infant helps order its polymorphous corporeal drives.

Rousseau's attempt to impose order on the sensations is not unique in the Enlightenment. For example, Rousseau's friend Etienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac, attempted to show how all knowledge originates in the sensations by using the model of a marble statue that he proceeds to imbue with all five senses, first one at a time and then in combination. Interestingly, just as Rousseau has a strong level of identification with Émile, Condillac demands that his reader put himself in the place of the statue:

He [the reader] should begin to live when it does, have only a single sense when it has only one, acquire only those ideas that it acquires, contract only the habits that it contracts: in short, he must be only what it is.¹⁰⁷

The statue has a very limited sense of self. The first sensation he is imbued with is a sense of smell. At this stage the statue is unable to distinguish itself from the odour that he is experiencing. It is only when he is imbued with a sense of touch, and is able to move, that he begins to gain a sense of itself as a physical entity.

Using touch he explores its own body:

The statue learns then to recognise its body and to recognise itself in all the different parts that make it up because as soon as it places its hands on one of these parts the same sentient being responds, as it were, from the one part to the other, 'this is me'. Let the statue continue to touch itself, and everywhere the sensation of solidity will represent two things that are mutually exclusive and at the same time contiguous, and everywhere also the same sentient being will respond from one to the other: this is me, this is me again'. The statue senses itself in all the parts of its body. Thus it will no longer confuse itself with its states.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Etienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac, *A Treatise on the Sensations* [*Traité des sensations*] in *Philosophical Writings of Etienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac*, trans. Franklin Philip (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates 1982), p.155.

¹⁰⁸ Condillac, p.234.

Larry Wolf has pointed out the autoerotic quality of the statue's experience of its own body: 'With movement the statue discovered its stone body, in pursuit of pleasure, of "agreeable sensations," and Condillac described at length a process of autoerotic exploration that his reader might also follow as they put themselves in the place of the statue.'¹⁰⁹ It is important to note that the statue's autoeroticism takes place at a time when the division between subject and object has not yet been fully established. The statue experiences the *sensation of self*. 'this is me', it does not yet have a clear sense of what is outside itself, 'this is not me':

When the statue comes to learn that it is something solid, I imagine that it is quite astonished not to find itself in everything that it touches. It extends its arms, as if to look for itself outside of itself, and it cannot yet judge if it will not indeed find itself there anew; experience itself can instruct it.¹¹⁰

The statue, kept in isolation from beings similar to it, can never fully develop a distinct sense of self because it has no concept of that which is other to it, beyond a basic concept of material difference. Moreover, without other similar beings around it, it cannot develop language, an important stage in the formation of the subject.

We might then ask why do philosophers such as Condillac and Rousseau appear to feel most at ease when their project-pupil-creation is in a state of speechlessness? Infancy, as Rousseau makes clear at the start of Book Two of *Émile*, has its root in the Latin word *infans* which means 'one who cannot speak' (*Émile* II, p.48). So using Rousseau's terminology we might describe Condillac's statue as an infant, though it has the form of an adult male. Clearly

¹⁰⁹ Larry Wolf, 'When I Imagine a Child', p. 392.

¹¹⁰ Condillac, p.234.

in the case of both Rousseau and Condillac there is a strong element of identification with their creations that seems to have a basis in narcissistic desire. Their fictitious creations allow both authors and their readers to return to a child-like state. Paradoxically, however, Rousseau and Condillac also achieve a certain level of control over and detachment from their creations. It is they who impose the rules and parameters that determine the pathway by which their 'infants' acquire knowledge. In this sense they gain self-mastery by controlling the life of sentient beings that cannot talk back to them.

In this way Enlightenment theories of language complicate the twentieth century linguistic theories of Lacan and Kristeva. The semiotic in Kristevian thought is submerged by the symbolic so that signification can take place in an orderly fashion, but the semiotic still has the 'revolutionary' potential to subvert modes of signification within the symbolic. Enlightenment thought turns this on its head. The pre-symbolic period before the emergence of language is the place that philosophers such as Locke, Rousseau and Condillac retreat to in order to gain control over and regulate the process of knowledge acquisition. Unlike Kristevan thought, it is this pre-linguistic phase of life that offers certainty and stability. With the onset of language meaning becomes unstable and uncertain as words become detached from the ideas that originally gave rise to them. In the case of Rousseau we might say that words also become detached from the bodies that speak them. Locke dismisses social discourse as a contaminant that pollutes the ideational source from which language draws its meaning, whilst Rousseau looks to infancy in order to reclaim a lost language of pure emotional expression. Both writers attempt to sever the link between language development and its social context. In the next section we shall turn to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

and to the process by which Victor Frankenstein's creation finds his voice. We shall do this in order to further explore the ideology behind eighteenth-century philosophies of language, and more generally to explore the relationship between language and socialisation.

Part Two

The early life of Mary Shelley's Creature is emblematic of humanity's historical development. The Creature, finding himself alone in the midst of nature, traces humanity's first steps from hunter-gatherers to civilisation. The description of him eating berries from the trees or off the ground, slaking his thirst at a brook before finally settling down to rest, echoes Rousseau's description of the first man in the *Second Discourse*¹¹¹: 'I see him satisfying his hunger at the first oak, and slaking his thirst at the first brook: finding his bed at the foot of the tree which afforded him a repast; and with that, all his wants supplied' (*Second Discourse* p.52). Driven by his physical needs the Creature leaves the woods to find food and stumbles on the hut of a shepherd. If we see the shepherd as representative of a nomadic herdsman then the encounter symbolises a transitional stage in human history before the development of fixed settlements. Indeed the Creature, having terrified the shepherd, continues on his way and finds himself in an agricultural settlement. This settlement signifies development

¹¹¹ See Paul A. Cantor, *Creature and Creator: Myth-making and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984), p.119-122; David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1988) p.183-184; Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Myth Her Monsters* (London: Routledge 1988) p.47-50; James O'Rourke, "'Nothing More Unnatural': Mary Shelley's Revision of Rousseau", *ELH*, vol.56 (1989), p.543-569; Alan Richardson 'From Émile to Frankenstein: The Education of Monsters', *European Romantic Review*, vol. 2 (1991) p.147-162.

contemporaneous with Shelley's own time. Her depiction of the history of civilisation through the Creature's journey then narrows in its focus. The Creature, forced to flee by villagers, conceals himself in a hovel from which he can observe the daily life of the De Lacey family. For Rousseau the family is the social unit upon which civilisation is founded, and so it is here in the De Lacey's cottage that the Creature's civil 'education' truly begins.

It is through observing the De Laceys that the Creature is able to find his voice, and it is this development that I shall focus on in this section. In observing the De Laceys the Creature is presented with a complex set of human exchanges. The cottagers' emotions and sentiments are expressed as much through physical demeanour as they are by speech. Music is another non-verbal form of communication used by the cottagers to express their feelings.¹¹² When the Creature does acquire the rudiments of language he listens in on the narratives that the cottagers tell to one another, narratives from books or stories about their own lives, and when he is fortunate enough to find a leather portmanteau full of books and learns to read, he gains further access to narratives that provide him with insights into the social milieu he is observing. Thus in finding a voice the Creature also develops a cultural accent.

In view of this it is too simplistic to regard the Creature as marginal to the range of cultural signifiers and discourses he observes. Indeed, paradoxically, his awareness that he is outside the forms of social life that are presented to him

¹¹² Peter Brooks detects the influence of Enlightenment debates on the origins of language in Mary Shelley's depiction of the Creature's language development. In particular Brooks notes the apparent influence of Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, in which Rousseau stresses the role of emotions in the emergence of language. See Brooks "'Godlike Science/Unhallowed Arts': Language, Nature, and Monstrosity", in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, eds. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press 1982), pp. 205-220; *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1993), p.204.

is the result of his immersion in the very cultural dialogue he is 'excluded' from. It cannot be said that the Creature enters into communication with the family he is watching unobserved. However, it is inadequate to portray him as outside their social world. To say he is marginal to the life of the De Lacey household might be correct in terms of his spatial location, but it does not adequately reflect his psychic location. From the outset the Creature is responsive and sensitive to the world he is observing. We might then say that though from the De Lacey's perspective the Creature does not enter into communication with them, from his perspective, and indeed from the reader's perspective, he does enter into a form of communion with the cottagers. This communion is instrumental in shaping his social consciousness.

The Creature's communion with the cottagers takes the form of his increasing attunement to the subtle nuances of their daily lives. He is particularly sensitive to the emotional states of the cottagers. Increasingly his own emotional state comes to reflect the ups and downs of their lives: 'when they were unhappy. I felt depressed; when they rejoiced, I sympathised in their joys' (*Frankenstein* p.89). One of the Creature's earliest experiences of emotional communion with his hosts occurs when he hears the De Lacey father playing a musical instrument. It is difficult to tell the impact the music alone has on the Creature. Certainly he finds it beautiful: 'sweeter than the voice of the thrush or the nightingale', but what occupies his attention is the effect the music is having on another listener, Agatha, who breaks down in tears in response to the mournful air her father is playing. In this way the emotional impact of the music cannot be separated from its social context.

He played a sweet mournful air, which I perceived drew tears from the eyes of his amiable companion, of which the old man took no notice, until she sobbed audibly: he then pronounced a few sounds, and the fair creature, leaving her work, knelt at his feet. He raised her, and smiled with such kindness and affection, that I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature: they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced, either from hunger or cold, warmth or food; and I withdrew from the window, unable to bear these emotions. (*Frankenstein* p.85)

It is interesting to compare Rousseau's depiction of natural language in *Émile* – the non-verbal language of gesture and intonation that takes place between a nurse and her infant – with the Creature's experience of social life. Similar to Rousseau's infant, the Creature picks up on the tonal quality of the sounds the cottagers produce as they speak to one another. For example, before the above episode he recalls Felix's words as consisting of 'a few sounds with an air of melancholy'. He is also responsive to the physical demeanour of the cottagers. He describes Felix's countenance as expressing 'a deep despondency' (*Frankenstein* p.85). In comparison, Rousseau's infant is responsive to the gestures and particularly the facial expressions of its carer. Like an infant the Creature may not understand the words that are being spoken to him, but he is swept up in the emotional *movement* that they convey. In terms of his own psychology the Creature is enveloped in a community of feeling. For a tantalising moment it is almost as if the music that fills the air and the emotional movement between the cottagers succeeds in breaching the gap that exists between the Creature and his hosts. But at the moment when the Creature's feelings are at their most intense, are reaching their emotional crescendo, he turns from the scene, and in so doing turns in upon himself.

In our earlier discussion we compared Rousseau's 'natural language' with Kristeva's conception of the semiotic as a pre-symbolic language. The semiotic as represented in the communion that takes places between a mother and her

child occurs at a transitional period prior to the division of subject and object, as the child's bodily intimacy with its mother leaves it unable to comprehend where it ends and its mother begins. What the Creature witnesses is the operation of the semiotic in social life, but the Creature witnesses it from a position of physical and spatial alienation. The Creature's alienation arises from the fact that he cannot help but participate in, but cannot be *seen* to participate in, the communion of social life.

The question again arises: what is the position of the Creature in relation to the world he is observing? In order to address this question it is useful to explore eighteenth-century conceptions of sympathy. David Marshall attempts a general definition of sympathy in the eighteenth century: 'sympathy was an act of identification in which one left one's own place, part, and person and took the place and part of someone else; while representing to oneself the other's feeling, one was transported outside of the self: placed beyond or beside the self in a moment of self-forgetting'.¹¹³ The Creature's act of sympathy towards the cottagers complicates Marshall's definition, because at this stage in the Creature's psychological development he has no clear sense of self to forget, or any real conception of the social identity of those he is meant to be 'taking the part of'. Marshall recognises the complex way that Mary Shelley is using eighteenth-century conceptions of sympathy, most notably Rousseau's conception of sympathy. In an important passage in Rousseau's *Essay on the Origin of Language* cited by Marshall, Rousseau relates the act of compassion, which he regards as being innate to humanity, with the rise of 'social feeling':

¹¹³ David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1988), p. 146.

We develop social feeling only as we become enlightened. Although pity is native to the human heart, it would remain eternally quiescent unless it were activated by imagination. How are we moved to pity? By getting outside ourselves and identifying with a being who suffers. It is not in ourselves, but in him that we suffer. It is clear that such transport supposes a great deal of acquired knowledge. How am I to imagine ills of which I have no idea? How would I suffer in seeing another suffer, if I know not what he is suffering, if I am ignorant of what he and I have in common.¹¹⁴

The Creature's experience of sympathy complicates Rousseau's model. Rousseau describes the act of transport whereby one takes the position of the other as requiring prior knowledge. Now we know that the Creature has experienced suffering. He weeps, for example, when confronted with the hardship of his early life. But the Creature's response to the cottager's suffering is more complex than this. Who is it that the Creature identifies with? Does he place himself in the position of Agatha, the person who is most clearly experiencing pain, or in the position of her father? Such a question simplifies what the Creature is experiencing. What he is responding to is not only the suffering of a fellow human being through the imaginative transportation of himself into their place but the communication of fellow feeling *between* human beings. What he responds to is the *response* of someone to another's suffering. In this way compassion for Mary Shelley is about more than identifying with the other, taking his/her place; it is about the human need to share and communicate our feelings.

Rousseau's model of sympathy locks human beings into themselves. They are only able to share in the pain of others through an act of the imagination. And even this act of the imagination is restricted by empirical parameters, as we can only imagine the pain of others if we have experienced similar pain ourselves

¹¹⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Essay on the Origin of Language' in *On the Origin of Language*, eds. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode, trans. John H. Moran (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1986), p.32.

and so have prior knowledge to reflect upon. In this way Rousseau places a gauge on sympathy.

The concept of social communion breaks down the dichotomy of inner and outer life that Rousseau's model depends upon. For example, those listening to the music in *Frankenstein* are experiencing a variety of emotions, and yet they are united not so much by the specificity of their emotions, but by the human capacity to be moved by music. As human beings we recognise in music something that is more than sound; we recognise our humanity. Thus the recognition of what is human should not be reduced to the recognition of the human form as the location of individuated selfhood.¹¹⁵

The meaning that is attached to the human form cannot be divorced from its social context, and yet paradoxically the human form comes to signify a distinct form of conscious life that is separate from the social world in the sense of being independent and self-governing. The rise of what Rousseau calls social feeling requires that, when we identify with the other, we not only recognise fellow-feeling but the social identity of the person having those feelings. This requires that we are aware of his or her place in the social order of things. In this way we map the social world around us and so become aware of our place and role within it.

As he watches the De Lacey family the Creature begins this process of mapping the social space he is observing, by developing an understanding of the social roles of the cottagers. Indeed his early language development is inseparable from his growing social awareness, as most of the first words he learns – father, sister, Agatha, Felix – are names that identify the cottagers or

¹¹⁵ This complicates not only eighteenth-century but also twentieth-century theories of subject formation, most notably Lacanian theory, that relates concepts of the self with the recognition of a spatially locatable and totalised body-image.

refer to their role in the family. The Creature also learns to identify the cottagers by their day-to-day activities, and so becomes familiar with their individual temporal regimes, and how these integrate into the overall timetable of cottage life. This new time regime is very different from Rousseau's limited view of early man's temporal awareness. According to Rousseau natural man rarely thought beyond the present: 'His soul, which nothing disturbs, is wholly wrapped up in the feeling of its present existence, without any idea of the future, however near at hand; while his projects, as limited as his views, hardly extend to the close of day' (*Second Discourse* p.62). In contrast civilised man's time is organised around the demands placed upon him by society.

Over time the Creature becomes aware of the physical labour the cottagers must perform in order to subsist. He also becomes aware that these labours are often inadequate, noticing for example that Felix and Agatha sometimes go hungry in order that their father might eat. In response to this he stops taking food from their store, but more importantly he begins to make unseen contribution to their labour. The Creature's first contribution is to produce firewood. He sees the positive effect of his actions when as a result of his labour Felix is able to spend the day 'repairing the cottage and cultivating the garden' (*Frankenstein* p.88). In time the Creature takes on a number of tasks that lessen the cottagers workload. Gradually his daily routine synchronises with that of his hosts.

The Creature's contribution to the economic life of the De Lacey family can be linked to his increasing feelings of communion with the cottagers, feelings that are fast developing into a more complex sense of community. There may be no exchange of words between the Creature and the cottagers, but the

Creature is offering his labour. What he gains in return is the opportunity to witness the positive effect his contribution makes to the collective life of the cottage. He also gains a name, as the cottagers speculate about the 'good spirit' who is acting on their behalf. His is a profoundly human act, a social act that impacts upon the material circumstances of his 'companions', but his help is only welcomed so long as his material form is absent, and so disconnected from his labour.

In relation to capitalist concepts of economic exchange the Creature is of course giving his labour for nothing in return. The idea that labour is a possession, a commodity to be exchanged, is an idea that Mary Shelley is addressing in her novel. C.B. Macpherson, who traces back the concept of individualism to seventeenth-century political thought, identifies what he describes as the 'possessive quality' that is attached to the concept of the individual: 'Its possessive quality is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as an owner of himself'.¹¹⁶ Macpherson relates this to Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* in which Locke regards the individual as being in possession of his own labour: 'Every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has a Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his'.¹¹⁷

The concept of work being the possession of the labourer contrasts with the Creature's relationship to his labour. The Creature does not regard his labour

¹¹⁶ C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977), p.3.

¹¹⁷ John, Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999), p. 287-288.

as his possession because he has no clear concept of property. His consciousness is suggestive of a time in human history, identified by both Locke and Rousseau, in which the earth was held in common, and so the idea of property did not arise. However, through the Creature's observations he does begin to conceive of how labour can be exchanged as a commodity. He notices, for example, how Felix often leaves the cottage for long periods, and the Creature concludes from this that Felix is working for a neighbouring farmer.

Locke relates the emergence of property rights to the act of labour; to work a particular stretch of land is to appropriate that land to oneself. Locke describes how over time the landscape becomes mapped in relation to property rights, as children inherit the land that their parents worked upon and appropriate more land. The right to property becomes bound through agreements and contracts between individuals, communities and nations. This system is further cemented by the introduction of monetary exchange. As the Creature develops a concept of property, and learns from overhearing the cottagers of the inequalities that blight modern society, he expresses in truly Rousseauian manner his abhorrence of the present economic state of society. He also realises that he has no place within the economic system as it stands:

[T]he strange system of human society was explained to me. I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, descent, and noble blood. The words induced me to turn towards myself. I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow-creatures were, high and unsullied descent united with riches. A man might be respected with only one of these acquisitions; but without either he was considered, except in very rare instances, as a vagabond and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profits of the chosen few. And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. (Frankenstein p.96)

The Creature's act of 'turning towards himself' is a reflective act of self-possession premised on the realisation of his social alienation. Thus, he gains a

political understanding of ‘possessive individualism’ by recognising that he is one of the dispossessed. Notably, the Creature’s criticism of the centrality of property to social organisation anticipates Macpherson’s criticism of Locke:

The core of Locke’s individualism is the assertion that every man is naturally the sole proprietor of his person and capacities – the absolute proprietor in the sense that he owes nothing to society for them – and especially the absolute proprietor of his capacity to labour. Every man is therefore free to alienate his own capacity to labour. This individualist postulate is the postulate by which Locke transforms the mass of equal individuals (rightfully) into two classes with very different rights, those with property and those without. Once the land is all taken up, the fundamental right not to be subject to the jurisdiction of another is so unequal as between owners and non-owners that it is different in kind, not in degree: those without property are, Locke recognises, dependent for their very livelihood on those with property, and are unable to alter their own circumstances. The initial equality of natural rights, which consisted in no man having jurisdiction over another cannot last after the differentiation of property. To put it in another way, the man without property in things loses that full proprietorship of his own person which was the basis of his equal natural rights.¹¹⁸

The Creature’s growing social awareness appears to be developing into a political consciousness. We might expect from this that he would identify with the position of the landless labourer or socially dispossessed. But this is not the case. As the De Lacey family become more prosperous following the entrance of Safie and the injection of the capital she has appropriated/stolen from her father, they become wealthy enough to employ servants, but the Creature far from identifying with the servants, continues to identify with and idolise his hosts. One of the reasons for this may well be that he wishes to remain within the cottagers’ discourse. The conversations of the servants, if they take place at all, are not included in the Creature’s narrative. For if, as Macpherson points out in relation to Locke, society is understood as ‘a series of relations between proprietors’, then to be without property is to be excluded from social dialogue and the wider *commerce* of social life.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, p.231.

¹¹⁹ C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, p.269.

The Creature has become bound up in the politics of identification. He has even developed an aesthetic sense founded upon his increasing familiarity with the cottagers: 'I saw few human beings beside them; and if any other happened to enter the cottage, their manners and rude gait only enhanced to me the superior accomplishments of my friends' (*Frankenstein* p.89). The Creature's sense of beauty is of course class encoded and considering his own form and economic status, highly ironic. However, the Creature cannot fully comprehend the cottager's own investment in the ideological form of their world. By maintaining modes of seeing that define their formal inclusion while excluding those whose presence deforms their cultural perspective, they maintain an aesthetic vision that places them centre stage. The Creature displaces his own perspective, in order to take up theirs, and in so doing sees himself as other:

I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers – their grace, beauty, and delicate complexions: but how was I terrified, when I viewed myself in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification. Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of the miserable deformity.
(*Frankenstein* p.90)

The Creature's tragedy is that his cultural imagination reflects the very ideology that must exclude him. The forms of the cottagers inhabit his imagination whether they are literally before his eyes or not: 'When I slept, or was absent, the forms of the venerable blind father, the gentle Agatha, and the excellent Felix, flitted before me' (*Frankenstein* 91). His daydreaming continues as he imagines the scene in which he reveals himself to his hosts. He deludes himself that the cottagers, though at first disgusted by the sight of him, will eventually be able to overlook his deformity. He hopes to *transform* himself in their eyes through the power of his speech. By revealing to them that they share

a *common language*. What this reveals is something of the relationship between cultural discourse and its ideological form. The Creature has moments of rationality when he realises that he is excluded from the social world he is observing, but the power of its visual form keeps the dream of his inclusion alive.

In order to shed some light on these contradictions it is useful to turn to the theories of the twentieth century Russian linguist V.N. Vološinov. Vološinov sees the development of consciousness in an individual and his/her level of semiotic awareness as indivisible. As modes of signification take place within a wider community then it follows that an individual's conscious mind is not a self-contained, self-referential totality. Vološinov argues that the ideology of a given community inevitably becomes interwoven into the consciousness of its members: 'Consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organised group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws. The logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of the semiotic interaction of a social group.'¹²⁰ Vološinov's theory may appear to have a negative aspect to it in that it suggests that it is inevitable that an individual becomes entrapped by ideology, as all modes of communication are structured in relation to it, but this would be to suggest that ideology is fixed and unchanging, and Vološinov does not believe this. Rather ideological transformation can be brought about through social interaction, and the inner life of the individual, his/her 'inner speech', has a part to play in this. The consciousness of an individual is not entirely passive, but is part of a wider

¹²⁰ V.N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (New York: Seminar Press 1973), p.13.

social dialectic, a fluid exchange between self and world that involves constant renewal.¹²¹

To reiterate, clearly the Creature is not an autonomous individual whose inner speech exists outside social intercourse, neither is it correct to say, using an eighteenth-century model of sympathy, that he is transported outside himself into the place of the other. Vološinov offers us an alternative model. Using his theories we might say that the Creature is in-between 'places': 'By its very existential nature, the subjective psyche is to be localised somewhere between the organism and the outside world, on the *borderline* separating these two spheres of reality. It is here that an encounter between the organism and the outside world takes place, but the encounter is not a physical one: *the organism and the outside world meet here in the sign*'.¹²² Vološinov's theory reveals that the Creature's 'position' in relation to social dialogue is not that different from that of the cottagers. But the most startling revelation of all for the reader, is that the Creature's position in relation to social dialogue reflects his/her own. Thus, the insiders have been outside all along, or rather, the dichotomy between inside and outside does not exist as we thought it did.

Vološinov's theory makes an interesting contrast with Locke's philosophy of language. The possessive individualism identified in relation to the *Two*

¹²¹ Peter Brooks, using Roland Barthes' concept of 'narrative contract' also emphasises Mary Shelley's stress on the social nature of language in *Frankenstein*. Brooks uses the episode in which the Creature finally engages Victor Frankenstein in conversation to explore how narration involves a form of contract that points to the fact that all language necessarily extends beyond the individual: 'The narrative contract, like the psychoanalytical transference, is based on and implies the intersubjective, transindividual, cultural order of language. Language by its very nature transcends and preexists the individual locutor; it implies, depends on, and necessitates that network of intersubjective relations from which the Monster protests he has been excluded. That is, in becoming the narrator of his story, the Monster both dramatizes his problem and provides a model for its solution, the solution implicit in the discursive interdependence of an 'I' and a 'thou' in any interlocutory situation.' Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1993), p.202.

¹²² V.N. Vološinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p.26.

Treatises of Government can be related to Locke's theory of language in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. As has been discussed, Locke views words as signifiers for ideas that arise in an individual's mind. These ideas *belong* to the individual as he has *acquired* them through his own sensory experience. Language is a functional tool by which ideas can be engendered in the mind of another individual. Locke comments on the difficulty of re-establishing the relationship between words and ideas once they have become obscured through dialogue: 'it being all one to go about to draw those men out of their mistakes, who have no settled notions, as to dispossess a vagrant of his habitation who has no settled abode' (*Essay* III, X, 4). Locke is dismayed at the way cultural dialogue can obscure meaning, as words, detached from the ideas they signify become 'homeless'.

In contrast Vološinov confines neither ideas nor language to individual consciousness. We are all lodgers within the semiotic and ideological superstructure: 'Individual consciousness is not the architect of the ideological superstructure, but only a tenant lodging in the social edifice of ideological signs,'¹²³ We may think we have acquired a discourse of the self that is unique to us, and that this provides us with a social identity that *belongs* to us and confers on us a position in society, but both our position in society, and the discourse that supports our position, though internalised, are products of an external ideology that we submit to. But ideology, even the ideology of 'possessive individualism', cannot eradicate or disguise the ongoing communion of social life. It is this social communion, a communion that exists at the base of all signification, that offers the very real potential for a revolutionary transformation

¹²³ Ibid, p.13

of society. But in order to realise this potential we must be dispossessed of the idea that social discourse is the 'rightful' property of a cultural elite.

The Creature, however, is unable to fully dispossess himself of this idea. His strongest identification tends to be with those people who 'possess' the most 'knowledge' of contemporary culture. The Creature comes to identify Felix as a man from whom he can learn the ways of the world. This is because Felix, following Safie's arrival in the cottage, takes on the role of teacher and cultural guide to his wife-to-be. Felix sets about the task of teaching French to the Arabian Safie. The Creature uses this as an opportunity to become 'master' of the cottagers' language. It is a matter of pride for the Creature that he is able to learn the language quicker than his fellow pupil: 'My days were spent in close attention, that I might more speedily master the language; and I may boast that I improved more rapidly than the Arabian, who understood very little, and conversed in broken accents, whilst I comprehended and could imitate almost every word that was spoken' (*Frankenstein* p.95). The Creature, coming from an indefinite social situation has fewer cultural barriers to overcome than Safie who already has a language that she is fluent in and who comes from a very different cultural background from her adopted family. The Creature also learns of the 'science of letters' as it is being taught to Safie, and so gains access to the books he is fortunate enough to have discovered in a portmanteau in the forest. He also becomes acquainted with another text, Volney's *Ruins of Empire*, that Felix uses in order to teach Safie about world history.

In *Frankenstein* the message of Volney's *Ruins* is conveyed through sweeping generalisations about race, culture and history.¹²⁴ Thus, along with acquiring the rudiments of language Safie consumes a distinctly white European ideology. The Creature and Safie learn of: 'the slothful Asiatics; of the stupendous genius and mental activities of the Grecians; of the wars and wonderful virtue of the early Romans' (*Frankenstein* p.95). We might ask whom Safie is supposed to identify with in relation to this ideological narrative. Is she supposed to see herself as one of the 'slothful Asiatics'? This question can be answered in relation to Safie's cultural background. The Creature conveys Safie's story at length, and we learn from this that Safie's mother was a Christian 'seized and made slave by the Turks' who taught her daughter 'in the tenets of her religion, and taught her to aspire to higher powers of intellect, and an independence of spirit, forbidden to the female followers of Mahomet' (*Frankenstein* p.99). Thus Safie has a double identity that allows her to identify with European Christian culture, while at the same time being racially other to this culture. And yet it is Safie's racial otherness - Felix calls her his beautiful Arabian - that is central to her appeal. Felix has no problem with her form, what he wants to modify through education is her cultural 'content'. Indeed the form she takes, as a female and an Arabian, conveys her passivity in relation to European culture, both positive attributes in the light of Felix's educational programme.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ For discussions that analyse *Frankenstein* in the context of Colonialism and Orientalism see, Elizabeth A. Bohls, 'Standards of Taste, Discourses of Race and the Aesthetic Education of a Monster: Critique of Empire in *Frankenstein*', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 18, 1994, pp. 23-36; Joseph W. Lew, 'The Deceptive Other: Mary Shelley's Critique of Orientalism in *Frankenstein*', *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 30, 1991, pp. 255-283; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism', *Critical Inquiry* vol. 12, 1985, pp.243-261.

¹²⁵ It is important to be alert to the fact that Mary Shelley may also have had an ideological investment in the racial and class stereotypes she portrays. For example, Anne K. Mellor points out the racist content in Mary Shelley's *History of A Six Weeks Tour through a part of France*.

The Creature's education takes place alongside Safie's.¹²⁶ Indeed he begins his education more 'ignorant' than she is. From this we might expect that he would identify with her more than any of the other cottagers. We might have expected that her racial otherness would have a strong resonance with him considering his own physical difference. To an extent the Creature does identify with his fellow pupil but in time he more and more comes to resemble his 'teacher', Felix.

One episode in particular conveys the Creature's transformation from pupil into would-be teacher. Following his final rejection by the De Lacey family, and most importantly his brutal beating by Felix, the Creature heads off in search of his creator/father Victor Frankenstein, following a trail that begins with the discovery of Victor's notebook in the pocket of his clothing. The episode begins with the Creature, having reached the environs of Geneva, stopping for a rest that develops into a 'slight sleep' in a rare moment that is 'free from the pain of

Switzerland, Germany and Holland, with Letters descriptive of a Sail round the Lake of Geneva and of the Glaciers of Chamouni (1817). Mellor comments on how Shelley 'feels entirely alien to the starving peasants and more prosperous burghers of France, Switzerland, and Germany'. At one point Shelley describes French peasants as being 'squalid with dirt, their countenances expressing every thing that is disgusting and brutal'. Mellor remarks of this: 'Here we must recognise Mary Shelley's deep aversion to the lower classes and the racist chauvinism implicit in her condemnation'. Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (London: Routledge 1988), p.25. Safie's life story in *Frankenstein* is riddled with racial clichés, many of which have been borrowed from Shakespeare. Safie's father is little more than a pale imitation of Shylock. He is money-grabbing, devious and loathes 'the idea that his daughter should be married to a Christian' (*Frankenstein* p.100). The character of Safie is suggestive of Shylock's daughter Jessica, while Felix is a Bassanio figure prepared to 'hazard' all for the woman he loves.

¹²⁶ Alan Richardson suggests that Mary Shelley's engagement with issues relating to pedagogy implicitly involves a critical response to Book Five of Rousseau's *Émile* in which Rousseau addresses the question of female education. Richardson notes the parallels that exist between Felix and Safie and Émile and Sophie, pointing out the similarity in the two women's names. Émile like Felix sets out to educate his fiancée giving 'her lessons in philosophy, physics, mathematics, history and everything else' (*Émile*, V, 465-466). Richardson notes in the relationship of Felix and Safie a power relationship that keeps Safie, like Rousseau's Sophy, in a subordinate position. This suggests that Mary Shelley's representation of Felix and Safie is intended as a critique of the female conduct book tradition, a tradition criticised by her mother Mary Wollstonecraft. See Alan Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1994), pp.206-212.

reflection'. The Creature's day-dreaming is interrupted by the approach of a 'beautiful boy' running towards him 'with all the sportiveness of infancy'. The appearance of the boy inspires the Creature with an idea: 'Suddenly, as I gazed on him, an idea seized me, that this little creature was unprejudiced, and had lived too short a time to have imbibed a horror of deformity. If, therefore, I could seize him, and educate him as my companion and friend, I should not be so desolate in this peopled earth' (*Frankenstein* p.116-117). The boy, however, turns out to be articulate in his prejudice, calling the Creature an 'ugly wretch' among other things. The boy also turns out to be well aware of his social status, warning the Creature that his father is a Genevan Syndic. The boy is of course Victor's brother William, and when he reveals this fact the Creature decides to murder him.

The initial educational potential that the Creature perceives in the boy is not all that different from the potential Rousseau sees in his fictional child Émile. What the Creature has become aware of is the power of pedagogy to shape young lives. But the Creature realises, as does Rousseau, that in order to maximise his influence on the child he must remove him from the realm of social discourse. As far as possible the Creature hopes to create an unbroken dyad consisting of pupil and teacher. Perhaps the Creature sees in the boy a younger version of himself. We might then say that like Rousseau and Condillac in relation to their 'infants' there is a narcissistic element to his educational ambitions. The Creature's request that Frankenstein create a mate for him can be seen in a similar light. Influenced by the relationship of Felix and Safie the Creature wants not only a mate but also a potential pupil. The Creature leaves the De Lacey cottage with nothing, his only 'possession' is the education he has

acquired, an education that results in him finding a voice through the articulation of the cultural discourses he has overheard. But, as Vološinov has taught us, these discourses do not belong to him but are borrowed from the very ideology that excludes him.

Chapter Seven

Victor Frankenstein, Citizen of Geneva

The city of Geneva in Mary Shelley's novel functions as more than just a backdrop to Victor Frankenstein's childhood. In *Frankenstein* the intellectual life of the city plays an important role in the formation of Victor's character. Geneva in the eighteenth century was a city grappling with the ideas of the Enlightenment. The city had historical connections with Voltaire, Montesquieu and itself produced Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Mary Shelley's portrayal of Victor's education appears to have been greatly influenced by Rousseau. Victor's father's teaching style has much in common with that proposed by Rousseau in *Émile*. But there are some aspects of Victor's personal ideology that do not owe their origin to the Enlightenment. Victor displays classic symptoms of what Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* describes as the Protestant work ethic. These tendencies reveal themselves when Victor works night and day to animate dead matter during his student years. Victor also displays a strong sense of a 'calling' that irresistibly compels him towards his fate. Most importantly Victor displays signs of social alienation and psychological isolation that appear at odds with Geneva's stereotype as a socially cohesive community. The intellectual antecedents of these characteristics can be traced back to another important figure in Genevan history, Jean Calvin. This Chapter explores the ideological interchange between Calvinism and Rousseau's philosophy in *Frankenstein*.¹²⁷ It shall do this in the context of Genevan social

¹²⁷ For a reading of Rousseau's political writing that stresses Rousseau's Genevan roots, and reads Rousseau in the context of Genevan economic, political and social history see Helena

history, stressing the role of culture as a means of ideological dissemination.

Now it needs to be stressed that I am not claiming that Mary Shelley had an intimate knowledge of Geneva's social history from the time of Calvin onward, though neither was she ignorant of Geneva's political and religious significance in the context of European history. I will explore Geneva's social history in the sixteenth century not in order to provide a purely historical context for *Frankenstein*, but to provide an interpretive model that stresses the dynamic between cultural transformation and ideological consolidation. In particular the way that ideologies can survive their social and historical genesis and be adapted to new modes of cultural articulation. There is no better example of this than the Protestant work ethic, an idea that has been robbed of its religious content but persists to the present day as an ideological imperative. *Frankenstein* provides us with an *interpretive moment* in which Mary Shelley inserts herself into the history of an ideology, and produces some remarkable insights and analysis. By beginning my analysis with a look at Calvin's Geneva I hope to go on to highlight just how profound her insights were, and how they have a continuing relevance beyond the historical moment of their articulation.

Geneva and Calvinism

At the height of his powers Calvin attempted to shape the people of Geneva into a social totality, a body of believers, who submitted to the authority of God through their adherence to the doctrine of the Reformed Church and their obedience to the religious and civil authorities whose job it was to order their

moral and social conduct.¹²⁸ Calvin's aim was not to centralise authority, but to disperse it among the community. Protestant Geneva prized the Word as the means of achieving this dissemination. The didactic sermonising of preachers was passed from the church to the homes of the congregation. In the homes of the faithful religious doctrine filtered through a domestic hierarchy and was internalised by the individual members of the household. In accordance with St Paul wives were instructed to be subject to their husbands: 'For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church'.¹²⁹ In return wives could expect to receive their husbands' love and religious instruction, so as to be washed clean by the Word.¹³⁰ Children were instructed to obey their parents, but parents were obliged not to provoke their children to anger, and to bring them up in the 'discipline and instruction of the Lord'.¹³¹ Servants were expected to obey their masters not only outwardly but internally, 'not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ'.¹³² In return for this they could expect their master's kindness, and escape undue severity.

In a sense Calvin wanted to transform Geneva into a weeklong Sunday school, in which religious teaching embedded itself in the structures of authority present in people's everyday lives. In doing this he attempted to construct a Christian community whose spiritual and social cohesion most closely resembled that of the early church. Of course all this does not make Calvin unique among

¹²⁸ See William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1989), Part 5, pp. 191-229; Gillian Lewis, 'Calvinism in Geneva in the Time of Calvin and of Beza (1541-1605)', *International Calvinism 1541-1715*, ed. Menna Prestwich (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1985); E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York: John Wiley and Sons 1967); R.H Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (Harmondsworth: Pelican 1964), pp.111-139; Mark Valeri, 'Religion, Discipline and the Economy in Calvin's Geneva', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 34, 1 (1997), pp.123-142.

¹²⁹ Ephes. 5.23 (N. R. S. V.)

¹³⁰ Ephes. 5. 25-27

¹³¹ Ephes. 6. 4

¹³² Ephes 6. 6 This passage originally referred to the treatment of slaves, but following the abolition of the trade in white Europeans it was adapted to include the treatment of servants.

Christian leaders. What does make him unique is the authoritarian means he employed in his attempt to build his Christian commonwealth, and the way Calvin attempted to adapt his teaching to fit the economic realities of the modern world.

Calvin's authoritarianism manifested itself in the constitution of a religious police force, the Consistory.¹³³ The Consistory's job was to enforce uniform religious practice, to uphold public morals and stamp out antisocial behaviour. The Consistory concerned itself with every aspect of human conduct demanding that all those within the walls of Geneva conform to its social and religious standards. It was aided in its work by those among the citizenry whose love for their neighbour extended to prying into their private affairs. The Consistory also functioned as an involuntary counselling service attempting to reconcile broken marriages, neighbourly disputes and family quarrels. As Max Weber suggests, Calvinism represented the institutionalisation of brotherly love. In the name of Christian brotherhood it imposed its teaching and moral pronouncements on the 'ungodly', not so as to secure their salvation, as the doctrine of predestination made clear that this was not in their gift, but so as to perform their own religious calling as society's moral guardians. Weber remarks:

Brotherly love, since it may only be practised for the glory of God and not in the service of the flesh, is expressed in the first place in the fulfilment of the daily tasks given by *lex naturæ* and in the process this fulfilment assumes a peculiarly objective and impersonal character, that of service in the interest of the rational organisation of our social environment.¹³⁴

¹³³ See Robert M. Kingdom, 'The Genevan Consistory in the Time of Calvin', *Calvinism in Europe 1540-1620*, eds. Peter Pettegree *et al* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994)

¹³⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London Routledge 1992), p.64.

In attempting to bring to order Genevan society, Calvin did not bring about a social revolution, but rather demanded the conservation of existing class hierarchies. Calvin conceived of social status as being divinely ordained. Whether you were rich or poor did not determine your position in heaven, but it revealed God's will for you upon this earth. Calvin believed it was the duty of all to labour within the confines of their social standing, and in so doing to contribute to a harmonious social order. Calvin believed that the rulers of the world, be they good or bad, had been divinely ordained. In the light of this it was the duty of Christians to submit themselves to their rule. Sixteenth-century Geneva was ruled by an aristocratic elite of established families. Calvin favoured this form of oligarchic rule above monarchy. He saw the magistrates of Geneva as representatives of the authority of God having received 'a commission from God, that they are endowed with divine authority, and that they in fact represent his person; acting in a certain sense in his place'.¹³⁵ As God's representatives, it was the duty of magistrates to bring down God's wrath on the unrighteous: 'for they are God's ministers to execute his wrath and wreak vengeance on evil-doers'.¹³⁶ Paradoxically, however, as Christians those who were the vehicles of God's judgement were not allowed to experience feelings of vengeance themselves. They acted on God's behalf in order to secure the public good: 'armed with power, to repress malefactors, whose wickedness disturbs and troubles the public peace'.¹³⁷ So alongside the Consistory's 'brotherly' instruction and 'neighbourly' advice, came a civil authority with the power to

¹³⁵ Jean Calvin, 'On Civil Government', trans. Harro Höpfl, in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), p.51.

¹³⁶ Jean Calvin, 'On Civil Government', trans. Harro Höpfl, in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), p.p.61

¹³⁷ Jean Calvin, 'On Civil Government', trans. Harro Höpfl, in *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991), p.60.

fine, banish, torture and execute those who transgressed the laws of God and his state. Thus behind Calvin's rhetoric of communal love, existed the authoritarian means to enforce Christian 'togetherness'. Max Weber thesis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* understands Calvinism to be the intellectual ancestor of bourgeois individualism. However Calvinism, at least in its rhetoric, appears to contradict Weber's thesis by subsuming the individual beneath the needs of the wider community:

God has joined and united us together so that we might have a community, for men should not be separate. It is true that our Lord had ordained *la police* so that each may have his household, his family, his wife, his children, so that each one will have his station, but in such a way that no one may be excepted from the community so that he can say, I will live for myself alone. That would be to live worse than a beast. What then? We should know that God has obligated us to one another to help each other; and at least, when we see anyone in need, although we cannot do him the good we would like, that we treat him humanly.¹³⁸

However, Weber's theory should not be dismissed on the evidence of Calvin's commitment to the building of a Christian community. It is Calvinism's influence on economic affairs that constitutes the basis of Weber's thesis. Geneva in the sixteenth century and beyond experienced an influx of migrants, a large proportion of whom came from the newly emerging middle class. Calvin welcomed these migrants, many of whom were enthusiastic supporters of the Reformed faith. His attitude to the trade and commerce these new comers brought to Geneva was not one of enthusiasm but tacit acceptance. Calvin did not approve of excessive wealth, or of decadent life-styles founded on such wealth. Neither did he associate poverty with ungodliness, as he recognised the place of the poor in Christ's mission. But he did recognise in commerce and trade a form of community - a means of social interaction, of communication:

¹³⁸ Calvin Sermon No. 71 on Job, in William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1986).

Those who use to advantage what God deposits with them are said to trade. For the life of the godly is aptly compared to business, since they should deal among themselves to maintain fellowship; and the industry with which each man prosecutes the task laid on him, and his very vocation, the ability to act aright, and the rest of the gifts, are reckoned as merchandise, since their purpose and use is the mutual communication among men.¹³⁹

Calvin believed that economic activity should be useful and socially responsible. Those involved in economic activities should treat it as a calling, and should labour in their vocation for the glory of God and the benefit of society. Calvinism in Geneva attempted to order the flow of capital for the benefit of the community. Unlike Medieval Christianity's distaste for usury, Calvin saw nothing wrong with money lending as long as the interest rate was reasonable. In order to insure this, interest rates were regulated within the confines of Geneva, and those making excessive profits through exploitation could be brought to the courts. In Weberian terms Calvinism was not capitalist because it loved money (it did not) but because it attempted to control its flow, as well as to regulate labour and order production. It resembles the spirit of capitalism in that it demands of its adherence that they may seek profit as long as they do so 'rationally and systematically'.¹⁴⁰

At the heart of Calvinism then, there is a contradiction. On the one hand, it is socially authoritarian, appearing to prize community above all else, while on the other hand it stresses individualism in its conception of the 'calling' as something that extends into the secular world. In addition, as Weber points out,

¹³⁹ Calvin's Commentary on Matt 25.20, the parable of the five talents. *Calvin's Commentaries: A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke*, vol. II, trans. T.H.L Parker (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press 1972), p.288.

¹⁴⁰ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans Talcott Parsons (London Routledge 1992), p.27.

its adherence to the belief of predestination left individuals spiritually isolated and unable to take control over their destiny:

In its extreme inhumanity this doctrine must above all have had one consequence for the life of a generation which surrendered to its magnificent consistency. That was a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual.¹⁴¹

Despite the strength of Weber's argument as a psychologically astute reading of the Protestant mind-set, it is wrong to characterise Calvinism as an ideology that produces socially alienated individuals. Calvinism's commitment to the idea of community is indisputable. However, Weber's theory is instructive when viewed in relation to a post-Calvinist world where some of Calvinism's key concepts continue to 'haunt' modernity, all be it in a form emptied of their original religious content. In the following discussion I hope to show how the ghost of Calvin haunts Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, shaping the lives and characters of the novel's central family.

The Frankensteins and Geneva

The figure of Alphonse Frankenstein may at first sight appear to be the very model of the enlightened citizen, but on closer inspection his enlightened outlook has a distinctly Calvinist edge to it. The Frankensteins are members of Geneva's political elite. They are an 'old' family whose ancestors have a history of public service as counsellors and syndics. Alphonse Frankenstein carried on the family tradition. Victor speaks with pride about his father's public service describing

¹⁴¹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans Talcott Parsons (London Routledge 1992), p.60.

him as having ‘filled several public situations with honour and reputation’ (*Frankenstein* p.18). The language used to describe Alphonse’s public work is characteristic of the language of ‘the calling’ or vocation that is so central to Calvinism. Alphonse is described as having displayed an ‘indefatigable attention to public business’ (*Frankenstein* p.18). His labour is spoken of in terms of a work ethic that involves self-sacrifice and self-discipline. His labour is an end in itself. To use Weber’s language, he is constantly ‘restless’ in his work and is described as being: ‘perpetually occupied by the affairs of his country’ (*Frankenstein* p.18). What is immediately noticeable in Victor’s articulation of his father’s sense of vocation is the absence of religious rhetoric. Alphonse is not described as working for the glory of God but for the public good.

Alphonse’s secular ideology reflects significant changes in the nature of belief across Europe in the eighteenth century.¹⁴² In the case of eighteenth century Geneva, the language of theology began to echo the language of the Enlightenment. Liberal theologians such as Jean-Alphonse Turretin and Jacob Vernet proposed that the Christian faith be seen in the light of reason. In the Academy of Geneva liberal theologians began to find common ground with Deists and even Atheists. As a consequence of the plurality of voices entering the debate the doctrinal unity of the Church began to unravel. The Calvinist model of the Church as a social totality, a community of faith representing the body of Christ, was no longer viable. Individual believers armed with their own

¹⁴² We might relate this to Mary Shelley’s father, William Godwin, who was brought up in an austere Calvinist family, and whilst away at school in Norwich became a follower of an extreme form of Calvinism known as Sandemanianism. Indeed Godwin was so devout in his faith that he spent a great deal of his early twenties seeking a position as a minister. In his mid to late twenties Godwin underwent a crisis of faith, and is now remembered for his atheism, and as one of the most significant contributors to British Enlightenment thought. Thus the life of Mary Shelley’s father may well have dramatised for her, in a very personal way, how the influence of the Enlightenment was challenging, and in the case of her father, replacing, older belief systems. For a discussion of Godwin’s early years see Peter H. Marshall’s *William Godwin* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1984), pp.1-76.

reason, were pursuing their own route to God. As a consequence the Church no longer provided the social cohesion and sense of common purpose it once had.¹⁴³

For many of Geneva's political elite, influenced by the political writing of the *philosophes*, most notably the Genevan Rousseau, the aspiration of creating a Christian commonwealth had been superseded by the project of creating an enlightened republic. But while Calvinism demanded that the whole community work together and congregate for Christian worship, the rhetoric of the Enlightenment allowed its ideological practitioners to work for the 'Public' without necessarily rubbing shoulders with the populace. As a consequence cultural distinctions between classes became more pronounced, and society more atomised.

For all Alphonse's rhetoric of public service the family he constructs around him is remarkably insular and inward looking. Having pursued a political career he turns his attention to his perceived obligation to produce children. He sees it as his civic duty to bestow 'on the state sons who might carry his virtues and his name to posterity' (*Frankenstein* p.18).¹⁴⁴ From Victor's narrative, it is

¹⁴³ See Linda Kirk, 'Eighteenth-Century Geneva and a Changing Calvinism', *Studies in Church History*, vol 18 – 'Religion and National Identity', ed. Stuart Mews, (Oxford: Blackwell 1982); Martin I. Klauber, 'The Eclipse of Reformed Scholasticism in Eighteenth-Century Geneva: Natural Theology from Jean-Alphonse Turretin to Jacob Vernet', *The Identity of Geneva: The Christian Commonwealth 1564-1864*, eds. John B. Roney and Martin I. Klauber (Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1998); Timothy R. Phillips, 'The Dissolution of Francis Turretin's Vision of Theologia: Geneva at the End of the Seventeenth Century', *The Identity of Geneva: The Christian Commonwealth 1564-1864*, eds. John B. Roney and Martin I. Klauber (Connecticut: Greenwood Press 1998).

¹⁴⁴ Like Alphonse, Godwin in *Political Justice* rationalises procreation, believing that it should be treated as the civic duty of reasonable men rather than as an act arising from sexual desire: 'Reasonable men then will propagate their species, not because a certain sensible pleasure is annexed to this action, but because it is right the species should be propagated; and the manner in which they exercise this function will be regulated by the dictates of reason and duty' (*Political Justice*, p.105). In view of this there is perhaps a strong temptation to see Alphonse as a Godwin figure, but it is also important to note how in other ways Alphonse's beliefs and actions contradict Godwin's philosophy. For example, unlike Alphonse, Godwin disapproved of procreation as a means of establishing one's name for posterity, even going so far as to advocate the abolition of surnames. Godwin also disapproved of the establishing of bonds of obligation between parents and children. Moreover, in many ways *Frankenstein* is a Godwinian novel, as

clear that Alphonse chanced upon his wife through an act of altruism. Alphonse goes in search of his close friend Beaufort. Beaufort we learn, is a failed merchant who left Geneva because of the shame he felt at his loss of public esteem.¹⁴⁵ Unperturbed by his friend's fall from grace Alphonse seeks him out, finding him in Lucerne. By this time his friend, having been ground down by poverty, is close to death. Following his death Beaufort's daughter Caroline is left an orphan and a beggar. Caroline has already impressed Alphonse by the duty she displayed towards her father, and the industry she employs in the 'plain work' she undertakes to keep her and her father alive. As an act of charity as much as of love Alphonse takes her in and she becomes his wife. Acts of charity and of public benevolence are made much of in Victor's narrative of his father's early life. Elizabeth is taken under the wing of the Frankenstein household, as is Justine Moritz who becomes their servant. Thus bonds of gratitude and obligation are central to the social fabric of the Frankenstein clan.

The obligations that underpin relations within the household are spoken of using the language of mutual respect rather than that of social deference. This is brought into sharp focus in the case of Justine. Justine, though a servant, is treated with great warmth and affection. In a letter to Victor, Elizabeth expresses her admiration of Geneva's social system and its enlightened attitude to the lower orders. The opinions she expresses have clearly been learnt by rote, and reveal an emergent discourse of bourgeois patronage:

most forcibly illustrated in Shelley's treatment of the mockery of justice that is Justine's trial. Nevertheless, there are aspects of Alphonse's rationalism and utilitarianism that have a distinctly Godwin-like edge to them. See Book VIII of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* [1793], 'On Property'. *Godwin's Political Justice: A Reprint of the Essay on Property*, ed. H.S. Salt (London George Allen and Unwin 1949).

¹⁴⁵ Many of the Frankensteins' friends and associates are men of business. True to Weber's analysis, business as a vocation is more than just another job. The fact that Beaufort, having failed in his 'calling', would rather face destitution for himself and his daughter than ask his friends for assistance and face the social stigma of failure, bears testimony to this.

The republican institutions of our country have produced simpler and happier manners than those which prevail in the great monarchies that surround it. Hence there is less distinction between the several classes of its inhabitants; and the lower orders being neither so poor nor so despised, their manners are more refined and moral. A servant in Geneva does not mean the same thing as a servant in France and England. Justine, thus received in our family, learned the duties of a servant; a condition which, in our fortunate country, does not include the idea of ignorance, and a sacrifice of the dignity of the human being. (*Frankenstein* p.46)

The façade of mutuality expressed by Elizabeth's rhetoric is set aside when Justine is accused of theft and murder following the discovery of William's body. Of course the real culprit is Victor's creation, but almost the entire community perceive Justine to be the guilty party. Even among the Frankenstein household, where Victor and Elizabeth are convinced of her innocence, there are those who presume her guilt. Alphonse Frankenstein, for example, makes the extraordinary remark that he would rather have remained in ignorance of the true identity of his own child's murderer than learn of the 'depravity and ingratitude in one I valued so highly' (*Frankenstein* p.59). Alphonse has revealed Justine's true crime in the view of Genevan society – ingratitude from a social inferior to her social superiors. When Victor insists to his father that Justine is innocent, his father does not take the proposal seriously but in a remark worthy of Calvin, insists that the family place their faith in the wisdom of the judges: 'If she is, as you believe, innocent, rely on the justice of our judges, and the activity with which I shall prevent the slightest shadow of partiality' (*Frankenstein* p.61).

In the 'mockery of justice' that follows Justine is sentenced to death, the jury having been convinced of her 'blackest ingratitude'. As a servant she failed to know her place, and to be inwardly grateful for the patronage she was receiving. But her anguish does not end with the passing of the death sentence. She is badgered by a priest demanding from her a confession: 'Ever since I was

condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was. He threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments, if I continued obdurate' (*Frankenstein* p.66). Justine's confessor may well be a Catholic priest (Justine's mother was a Catholic) but he has a strong resemblance to one of Calvin's Consistory, and he certainly appears to have the same ideological function. Excommunication was a sanction favoured by the Consistory. It meant more than just exclusion from religious worship and communion, it implied exclusion from the wider community. The important thing in the case of Justine, is that it is not enough for her to be found guilty, she must internalise the prohibitive taboo on the crime she is alleged to have committed. Mary Shelley's own attitudes to Calvinism and Geneva are made clear in her entry under 'Rousseau' in Dionysius Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia*. Here she describes Rousseau as having been 'brought up in a bigoted calvinist city'.¹⁴⁶ She goes on to describe Rousseau's leaving for Paris after having returned to his native city in adulthood as an attempt to escape the 'inquisitorial and pedantic tone [that] reigned in Geneva', a tone 'clothed in the garb of virtue and reason'.¹⁴⁷

The cruelty, barbarity and heavy handedness of Justine's court case is suggestive of the actions of the civil courts at the time of Calvin. This unsubtle means of assuring social order is seen as distasteful by the younger members of the Frankenstein family who have been brought up with a more enlightened conceptions of civil justice. But the social function of the trial, to punish the transgressor, and so teach others to know their place in the social

¹⁴⁶ Mary Shelley, 'Rousseau' in *Mary Shelley's Literary Lives and Other Writings*, vol. 3, *French Lives (Molière to Madame de Staël)*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (London: Pickering and Chatto 2002), p.325.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 339.

order has the same ideological aim as Alphonse Frankenstein's benevolent rule over his household. The aim is that everyone should know their place and keep to their appointed tasks. Alphonse is not a disciplinarian. He achieves his authority through the process of educating his children and dependents. In doing this he achieves their respect and admiration, but most importantly their gratitude. Alphonse is representative of a new type of father/tutor. He has a striking resemblance to the tutor Jean-Jacques in Rousseau's *Émile*.

In *Émile* Rousseau advocates kindness and friendship towards children as a means of establishing one's authority over them. In this way you achieve their obedience not through fear and threats but through their willing submission to your rule: 'But see what fresh chains you have bound about his heart. Reason, friendship, affection, gratitude, a thousand bonds of affection speak to him in a voice he cannot fail to hear' (*Émile* IV, p.336). In *Frankenstein* Victor is very well aware of the debt of gratitude he owes his parents: 'No creature could have more tender parents than mine ... My improvement and health were their constant care' (*Frankenstein* p.19). He feels particular obligation towards his father. The reason for this can be traced back to the Calvinist concept of the 'calling'. Like Rousseau, Alphonse views his role as educator as a full time vocation, a vocation that is distinct from the biological fact of his paternity. Victor and his siblings are made aware of the significance of his father's undertaking and the time and effort involved in his new *employment*: 'When my father became a husband and a parent, he found his time so occupied by the duties of his situation, that he relinquished many of his public employments, and devoted himself to the education of his children.' (*Frankenstein* p.19). The private world of home and family is coming to resemble the adult world of work

and responsibility. Familial roles such as father, mother, brother, sister are becoming rationalised and institutionalised. Victor comes to realise that he is the *product* of his father's labour of love, and that he has his own duties awaiting him in later life: 'I was the eldest, and the destined successor to all his labours and utility' (*Frankenstein* p.19). Alphonse has managed to instil in his eldest something akin to a 'Protestant guilt complex'. The 'Protestant guilt complex' might be summarised as follows: 'because I have laboured on your behalf you are obliged to obey me'. Notably Rousseau recommends using guilt as a means of manipulating youngsters when they become old enough to rebel against adult rule:

I will say to him: 'You are my wealth, my child, my handiwork; my happiness is bound up in yours; if you frustrate my hopes you rob me of twenty years of my life, and you bring my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.' This is the way to gain a hearing and to impress what is said upon the heart and memory of the young man. (*Émile*, V, p.344)

The type of psychological control advocated by Rousseau and illustrated in *Frankenstein* can only work on a small social scale, ideally within the framework of the family. It is the hope of men like Alphonse that the individual brought under his instruction will contribute to the general good of all by first recognising his obligation and duty towards his nearest and dearest. This view echoes Rousseau who viewed the home and family as the pillar of the state: 'Can patriotism thrive except in the soil of that miniature fatherland, the home? Is it not the good son, the good husband, the good father, who makes the good citizen?' (*Émile* p.390).

Those born into the upper echelons of European society like Victor Frankenstein, whose parents had a mission in mind for him before he was even

born, must have had the sense that they had a preordained path they were destined to follow. Once again we see the shadow of Calvin's theory of predestination, but again robbed of its religious content. Moreover, whereas Calvin's pilgrims might have expected to experience Christ-like suffering and hardship as they carried their crosses, children like Victor could expect to experience relative 'freedom' and happiness, particularly during their childhood years. In theory children born to 'enlightened' parents would, on coming of age, have been free to choose their own destiny. In practice many had been psychologically programmed to 'choose' exactly what their parents intended for them.

Alphonse begins to build Victor's future around him while he is still a small boy. He adopts a 'playfellow' for Victor in the figure of his cousin Elizabeth, who Victor's mother soon determines would make an excellent future wife for her son. Elizabeth has strong parallels with Sophy, Émile's fiancée in Rousseau's text. Her attributes conform to Rousseau ideals of femininity. She is said to be 'gentle', 'affectionate', 'docile' and good'. In Elizabeth's attitude to authority we see the repetition of the same formula we have witnessed in relation to Victor and Justine. She is given relative liberty, but is programmed to be psychologically submissive: 'No one could better enjoy liberty, yet no one could submit with more grace than she did to constraint and caprice' (*Frankenstein* p.20). Victor is quite aware of Elizabeth's subordinate place in the pecking order, and his talk of her reflects this: 'I loved to tend on her, as I should on a favourite animal.' (*Frankenstein* p.21).

In *Émile* Jean-Jacques plans his pupil's future betrothal, filling his pupil's imagination with tales of his future wife's virtue and rustic simplicity in order

that he might draw a negative comparison with 'lesser' females. He names his ideal of femininity Sophy. Unbeknown to Émile Sophy has already been 'discovered'. Through a 'chance' meeting and Jean-Jacques' skill as 'the confidant of these two young people and the mediator of their affections' the two fall in love and become devoted to one another. In a sense Alphonse Frankenstein's manipulation of his son is far less subtle, Victor realises from an early age that his parents expect him to marry Elizabeth,¹⁴⁸ but the logic of manipulating a child so that his longings and desires match with its adult carer is the same. Rousseau expresses this logic when he defends his right to influence his pupil's marital future, though he is only Émile's adopted father: 'it is I who am really Émile's father; it is I who have made a man of him. I would have refused to educate him if I were not free to marry him according to his own choice, which is mine.' (*Émile*, V, p.442)

Victor describes his childhood as a happy time. His education, in accordance with Rousseau's conception of negative education, is not forced but allowed to happen at a natural pace. Alphonse is an unobtrusive parent, who guides his children without being domineering: 'Our studies were never forced; and by some means we always had an end placed in view, which excited us to ardour in the prosecution of them' (*Frankenstein* p.21). Victor seems genuinely to appreciate his father's enlightened teaching methods, not merely because they are less authoritarian than established practices, but because they allow for the joy of learning.

¹⁴⁸ It is worthy of note that Rousseau describes having considered bringing Émile and Sophy up together but rejected the idea: 'I meant to train a helpmeet for Émile, from the very first, and to educate them for each other and with each other. But on consideration I thought all these premature arrangements undesirable, for it was absurd to plan the marriage of two children before I could tell whether this union in accordance with nature and whether they were really suited to each other' (*Émile*, V, p.441). So Alphonse does indeed outdo even Jean-Jacques in his attempts to influence his children's future!

So what goes wrong in Victor's education? On a practical level there is nothing wrong with Alphonse's teaching methods as Victor is transformed into an enthusiastic scholar. Moreover, it is too easy to blame Victor's ruin on the intrusion of alien knowledge from a less enlightened age in the form of Cornelius Agrippa's occultism. Indeed Victor does not blame Agrippa for leading him astray, but rather his father's attitude to his reading Agrippa which forces him to pursue his new found interest in secret. Victor stresses his father's dismissive response to Agrippa who he describes as a 'waste of time' and 'sad trash'. Victor clearly feels resentment at the breakdown in communication between him and his father. This break down in communication is based on more than Victor's rationalisation that his father should have explained to him that Agrippa's theories had been exploded by advances in modern science. Perhaps what Victor is reacting to is his father's utilitarianism. His father's steadfast belief that all that he does, every human encounter he enters into, must be useful, must have a clear purpose, or else be deemed a waste of time.

Victor's continued pursuit of knowledge unsanctioned by his father may well be a rebellious response to his father's control over his life. The works of Agrippa, Paracelsus, and Albertus Magnus are seen by Alphonse as being redundant to the modern age and so of no use to Victor's future. It is strange to think that under Calvin Victor's activities such as attempting to raise ghosts or devils through the recitation of incantations might have seen him prosecuted for witchcraft. In the more enlightened eighteenth century his interest in the supernatural, if discovered, would have been dismissed as irrational nonsense. And yet in Victor's pursuit of the supernatural we see the desire to resurrect a dead religion. Both Calvinism and the Enlightenment attempted to erase the

persistence of folk religion and magic. In the case of Calvinism, Weber sees its resistance to superstition as an attempt to repudiate an alternative method of salvation:

That great historic process in the development of religions, the elimination of magic from the world which had begun with the old Hebrew prophets and, in conjunction with Hellenistic scientific thought, had repudiated all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin, came here to its logical conclusion. The genuine Puritan even rejected all signs of religious ceremony at the grave and buried his nearest and dearest without song or ritual in order that no superstition, no trust in the effects of magical and sacramental forces of salvation, should creep in.¹⁴⁹

Victor's interest in magic can be seen as an attempt to resurrect the idea of salvation. But it is salvation in a secular world as Victor seeks the 'elixir of life' in order to 'banish disease from the human frame'. Victor's 'magic' has no connection with any residual folk culture. Victor sees no cultural meaning in the rituals he performs, they are simply a means to an end. He goes further than Weber's Puritan who refuses to perform burial rituals, as Victor does not even respect the sanctity of the grave. Victor, while reacting against his father's utilitarianism, has begun to display aspects of it in his attitude to life and death.

The attitude of the Frankensteins to death and bereavement is revealing of the pervasiveness of their utilitarian ideology. The greatest misfortune to afflict the family before Victor's departure to the university of Ingolstadt is the death of Victor's mother. Victor does not go into the specifics of his experience of grief because he regards grief as something that is universally experienced: 'why should I describe a sorrow which all have felt, and must feel' (*Frankenstein* p.27). Even on her death bed Caroline is preoccupied with insuring that her aspirations for the future go ahead, and that the vacancy she leaves will be filled by Elizabeth both as Victor's future wife and her children's guardian. The logic

¹⁴⁹ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p.61.

of this might be summarised as follows: If roles within a family are perceived in terms of occupations or situations, then when a situation is vacated, for example when its occupant dies, reason demands that the vacancy should be filled by a suitable replacement with the right temperament and skills for the job. In this way the class ideology of the Frankensteins is perpetuated by a pragmatism that places the collective survival of the family unit above the emotional needs of its individual members.

Following Caroline's death excess grief is described as an 'indulgence', and emphasis is placed on carrying on as normal: 'My mother was dead, but we had still duties which we ought to perform, we must continue our course with the rest, and learn to think ourselves fortunate, whilst one remains whom the spoiler has not seized' (*Frankenstein* p.37). Victor's career is curtailed no more than necessary, with a three-month grieving period before he sets off for Ingolstadt. Alphonse does not allow bereavement to get in the way of his son's destiny. But it is only on returning from Ingolstadt, following the animation of Victor's creation, and William's murder, that we discover the full extent of Alphonse's utilitarian rationalism. Victor, weighed down by guilt for the deaths of William and Justine is no longer able to control his grief. In response Alphonse delivers his rationale for the repression of emotion: 'is it not a duty to the survivors, that we should refrain from augmenting their unhappiness by an appearance of immoderate grief? It is also a duty owed to yourself; for excessive sorrow prevents improvement or enjoyment, or even the discharge of daily usefulness. without which no man is fit for society' (*Frankenstein* pp. 69-70). In response to his father's remarks Victor retreats into himself in order to conceal his feelings. So though Alphonse's remarks are intended to produce a greater awareness of the

feelings of others in his son, his remarks show a distinct lack of awareness of what his son is going through. The result is that Victor retreats into himself becoming increasingly more isolated and lonely.

We might turn again to *Émile* in order to understand the basis of Alphonse's position. In a rather bizarre episode in *Émile* Jean-Jacques, after having encouraged Émile's love for Sophy, asks his pupil: 'What would you do if someone told you Sophy were dead? (*Émile*, V. p.486). Naturally Émile is horror struck at his tutor's remarks, but after he has calmed down Jean-Jacques assures him that his fiancée is still alive. The purpose of Jean-Jacques remark is to prepare his pupil for the inevitability of bereavement and loss. It is also to encourage in him a sense of self-reliance and self-preservation founded on self-love: 'Self-preservation requires, therefore, that we shall love ourselves; we must love ourselves above everything, and it follows directly from this that we love what contributes to our preservation' (*Émile* p.208).¹⁵⁰ The logic of Rousseau's remarks might help to explain Victor's monumental egotism, but it also explains the basis of the Frankensteins' love for one another. Theirs is a love based upon their mutual interest in their collective preservation. After psychologically preparing his pupil for the inevitability of loss and the importance of self-reliance, Jean-Jacques informs his pupil that he must temporarily leave Sophy in order that he might travel and experience the world.¹⁵¹ Similarly Victor, shortly after losing his mother sets off for the University of Ingolstadt. Victor might have attended the world renowned Academy of Geneva, but Victor's father has

¹⁵⁰ For a discussion of the concept of self-love in the context of Genevan Calvinism and the influence of this on Rousseau see Helena Rosenblatt's *Rousseau and Geneva: From the First Discourse to the Social Contract, 1749-1762* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), pp.66-68.

¹⁵¹ This parallels Victor's courtship of Elizabeth. After becoming formally engaged to Elizabeth Victor embarks on two years of travel before marriage.

already decided upon Ingolstadt, seeing the process of leaving home as an important rite of passage: 'my father thought it necessary for the completion of my education, that I should be made acquainted with other customs than those of my native country' (*Frankenstein* p.26). Thus in *Frankenstein* as in *Émile* human relations and emotions are not allowed to get in the way of a young man's education.

Victor Finds His Calling.

As Victor makes his way towards Ingolstadt it suddenly dawns on him that this is the first time in his life that he has been truly alone. He realises that he must attempt to make new friends and acquaintances in Ingolstadt but he is also aware of how uncomfortable he is around strangers:

In the university, whither I was going, I must form my own friends, and be my own protector. My life had hitherto been remarkably secluded and domestic; and this had given me invincible repugnance to new countenances. I loved my brothers, Elizabeth, and Clerval; these were 'old familiar faces': but I believed myself totally unfitted for the company of strangers' (*Frankenstein* p.28).

When Victor reaches Ingolstadt, the human need for company is unable to conquer his repugnance to new faces, and he sinks into a self-imposed isolation retreating into his 'solitary apartment'. Victor's main points of human contact are with the professors who aid him in his scientific work. and though he develops a particular liking for one of his teachers, Waldman, these relationships are undoubtedly judged in terms of their utility.

In Ingolstadt Victor finds his 'calling' as he searches for a means by which to animate dead matter. The way that Victor talks about his newly

discovered vocation is of significance. At first he treats his work with the same attitude that his father treated his civic responsibilities, and regards his studies as a duty involving self-discipline and resolution, but over time his labours become less an occupation and more a mode of being: 'That application, which at first had been a matter of duty and resolution, now became so ardent and eager, that the stars often disappeared in the light of morning whilst I was yet engaged in my laboratory' (*Frankenstein* p.32). Victor's ceaseless labour has a strong resemblance to Weber's description of the Protestant work ethic. In accordance with Weber model of the 'rational ethic of ascetic Protestantism' Victor is disciplined, inclined to abstinence and is wholly devoted to his work. He also has a systematic response to the task in hand and a strong sense of procedure and process. But Victor goes beyond even Weber's description of the Protestant worker. For Victor the work ethic is more than an ideology that guides one through life; it is life. Victor is all but dead to the physical as well as the social world, becoming unaware of the changing of the seasons or of his family back in Geneva. As Judith Wilt suggests, he is 'dead' both in terms of a Lockean model of sensory deprivation and in terms of a Christian model of spiritual death: 'I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit' (*Frankenstein* p.36).¹⁵² Normal 'life signs' are replaced by the impulse to labour at a single occupation; it is this spirit that animates Victor. Victor even comes to resemble a corpse: 'My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement' (*Frankenstein* p.36). Victor does not labour under the ideology of the Protestant work ethic, he has internalised its values to the point of being indistinguishable from them. We see in Victor's 'frantic impulse'

¹⁵² Judith Wilt, 'Frankenstein as Mystery Play' *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley's Novel*, ed. George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher (Berkeley :University of California Press 1979) p.38.

to complete his labours the ardour of the faithful, at one point he describes himself as being ‘animated by an almost *supernatural* enthusiasm’ (*Frankenstein* p.33). Victor is not faithful to a Christian God, nor does he fear external supernatural forces. His father, after all, has taken the ‘greatest precautions’ that his mind is not ‘impressed with supernatural horrors’ (*Frankenstein* p.33).¹⁵³ But though Victor is not concerned with the spirits of the dead he is, as Weber puts it, haunted by a dead ideology: ‘the idea of duty in one’s calling prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs’.¹⁵⁴ For Victor the spirit that he needs to exorcise dwells within.

Whilst at Ingolstadt Victor is a deeply antisocial individual, and yet the aim of his labour is to create a community in the form of a species of beings who will bless him ‘as its creator and source’ (*Frankenstein* p.36). Victor wants to create an alternative society because he is unwilling to take part within existing social structures. We see in Victor the figure of the social engineer who hopes to construct a world that fits his social vision. We see in Victor the reflection of his father. Like his father, Victor expects to ‘claim the gratitude of his child’, but unlike his father he is not prepared to put in the psychological ground work in order to attain such gratitude. Victor’s conception of society is an abstract one as he is unable to see society as a complex web of human relations.

In our discussion of Genevan history we have seen a historical shift from the unified society of Calvin in the sixteenth century, to the middle class model of atomised nuclear families in the eighteenth century as epitomised by the

¹⁵³ Judith Wilt also relates Victor’s lack of squeamishness with his Genevan education remarking: ‘In the grisly study of worm and waste, of rot and decay, he is checked by no natural or supernatural repugnance, having had a thoroughly republican pragmatic education.’ Judith Wilt, ‘Frankenstein as Mystery Play’, p.38.

¹⁵⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans Talcott Parsons (London Routledge 1992), p.124.

Frankensteins. In Victor Frankenstein creation we see a further progression with the production of a socially alienated individual. Victor works within the confines of scientific reason in order to create life, but his labours become morally dubious because of Victor's failure, itself a product of his childhood, to display unconditional love to the being he has created. The failure of Victor Frankenstein to recognise the humanity of his creation can be related to Calvinist ideology and the institutionalisation of brotherly love. Victor loves people only after he has recognised their role and function in relation to himself.

Creating Employment

The revolt and terror that Victor experiences when he finally comes face to face with his creation rids him of any desire to return to his 'calling'. Thus with the culmination of his labour it initially appears that the 'work ethic' that has possessed Victor for so long has finally been exorcised. The arrival in Ingolstadt of Victor's childhood friend Henry Clerval further encourages Victor's resurrection from the death-like state he has been labouring under: 'I was unable to contain myself. It was not joy only that possessed me, I felt my flesh tingle with excess of sensitiveness, and my pulse beat rapidly' (*Frankenstein* p.42).

Despite Victor's high spirits the mental exhaustion and sleep deprivation that have accompanied his work over the previous weeks and months finally take their toll and Victor sinks into a comatose state that lasts for several months. However, on returning to consciousness Victor does not regress into antisocial behaviour but is reawakened to social life. He makes enquiries of Clerval

concerning his family and looks forward to returning home to Geneva. He also rediscovers a love of nature, taking a two-week walking tour with Clerval around the environs of Ingolstadt. The experience of nature transports him back to childhood when 'happy, inanimate nature had the power of bestowing on me the most delightful sensations' (*Frankenstein* p.51).

The work ethic provided Victor with a mode of being: a structure of sensation organised around the demands of his labour. In rejecting the Creature, the product of his labour, he rejects this mode of being. For a very short time Victor appears to replace the ideology of the work ethic with an alternative ideology – Romanticism. However, Victor the 'Romanticist' is never allowed to fully express himself in the novel. Mary Shelley will not allow Victor to escape his responsibilities towards the being he has given life to, and it is from this that the central black comedy of the novel unfolds. Shortly after Victor has renounced the work ethic, the product of his past labours, the Creature returns to demand that he return to work, this time involuntarily.

The consequences of the Creature's actions, the murder of William, the execution of Justine, results in Victor returning to a death-like state: 'solitude was my only consolation – deep, dark, death-like solitude' (*Frankenstein* p.69). The Creature is determined to prevent Victor's sensate self from expanding in new directions. He does not want Victor's imagination to attach itself to new objects of interest. At those moments at which Victor's life might be taking on a new direction away from his 'appointed' task, the Creature's appearance reminds him of his responsibilities. Victor's first encounter with the Creature following his abandonment of him is an example of this. Victor is approaching the summit of Montanvert and is experiencing a moment of the sublime: 'My heart, which

was before sorrowful, now swelled with something like joy' (*Frankenstein* p.76).

It is at this moment that the Creature appears to him.

The pact made between Victor and his creation on Montanvert leads in time to Victor returning to his labour on a remote Scottish island. But whereas before Victor treated his labour rather like a capitalist entrepreneur treats a business venture, marvelling in the new innovations that applied science can produce, Victor is now firmly in the employ of another. Removed from self-employment, Victor now finds his work an unpleasant chore. He yearns for moments of leisure and recreation when he can escape from his toil, but is then driven to return to his occupation with fresh ardour in order to meet his obligations. In this way he resembles the industrial worker of the nineteenth century. Victor has become alienated from his labour:

As I proceeded in my labour, it became every day more horrible and irksome to me. Sometimes I could not prevail on myself to enter my laboratory for several days; and at other times I toiled day and night in order to complete my work. It was indeed a filthy process in which I was engaged. During my first experiment, a kind of enthusiastic frenzy had blinded me to the horror of my employment; my mind was intently fixed on the sequel of my labour, and my eyes were shut to the horror of my proceedings. But now I went to it in cold blood, and my heart often sickened at the work of my hands. (*Frankenstein* p.137)

The Creature's presence, like that of a nineteenth century factory owner, is felt even in his absence. He is the 'unseen eye' watching over proceedings:

I grew restless and nervous. Every moment I feared to meet my persecutor. Sometimes I sat with my eyes fixed on the ground, fearing to raise them lest they should encounter the object which I so much dreaded to behold. (*Frankenstein* p.137)

The model of Victor as 'industrial worker' with the Creature as 'overseer' can only be taken so far. The class status of the Creature is a complex one, and is hard to define in relation to historical models of social class. The Creature's physical strength and stature suggests that he represents a new type of worker

ideally suited to industrial labour. However, his early life is spent in the countryside, and the subsistence life he leads and his homeless status is suggestive of the lifestyle of a landless agricultural peasant. In addition to this the Creature is also suggestive of a time in human history that pre-dates hierarchies of social class as he has a close resemblance to Rousseau's natural man. Just to add to the confusion, in terms of culture, education and even manners the Creature is middle class, having been exposed to the middle class ideology of the De Lacey family. All that we can conclude from this is that the Creature's class is indeterminate. He seems to embody transition in relation to both history and society, and this in part helps to explain the anxiety he produces in readers. He symbolises an element in historical change that is unpredictable and de-stabilising. In the case of Victor, the Creature brings about the loss of one of his most prized possessions - his intellectual independence. Victor's loss may well represent an anxiety felt by Mary Shelley's own class, the European intelligentsia, that in the coming decades of the of the nineteenth century they too would have their intellectual pursuits managed and controlled by 'others'.

Victor is his own grave-digger, not only because he produces his nemesis, but also because the being he produces is not wholly 'other' to him. If we return to Victor and the Creature's encounter on Montavert, we find that Victor is won over to the Creature's request by the reasonableness of his argument. The Creature and Victor share a common mode of discourse and structure of thought – the discourse of reason. The Creature is calm and restrained, far calmer than Victor. His argument is structured, and he is convinced of its rightness: 'You are in the wrong ... and instead of threatening, I am content to reason with you' (*Frankenstein* p.119). The Creature makes constant interjections, stressing that

his request that Victor produce a mate for him is 'reasonable' and 'moderate'. On the rare occasions when his passion flares up the Creature is aware of the need to restrain himself as such 'excess' of passion is counter productive to his argument and his mental well being. The Creature's argument has an internal logic to it. The Creature is an outcast from all mankind, and so why should he love those who would destroy him? He concludes: 'Shall I not hate them who abhor me? (*Frankenstein* p.78). His solution to this dichotomy, that will both compensate him for his alienation and prevent him venting his anger upon mankind, is that Victor produce for him a female companion. The Creature's reasoning persuades Victor of the justice of his argument and Victor feels for the first time the obligation he has towards his 'child'.

In the Creature's argument we encounter the same social constructionism and moral relativism that characterises Victor and his father Alphonse's social vision. Victor finally acknowledges his responsibilities to his creation, but at no point hypothesises concerning the duties he would owe towards the female he is to produce. Just as Elizabeth was presented to Victor as his 'playfellow', so Victor offers to create for the Creature another living being to compensate him for his loneliness. The Creature employs the political rhetoric of the Enlightenment, claiming that he has a 'right' to a companion: 'I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse' (*Frankenstein* p.118). But what rights would the female being Victor agrees to create have? Such a woman is viewed as having no independent life of her own, she is produced to compensate for an emotional lack in the life of her mate. She is the mirror that will recognise and respond to the Creature's emotional state, fulfilling his narcissistic desire to have his thoughts and feeling reciprocated: 'Let me see that I excite the sympathy of

some existing thing' (*Frankenstein* p.120). The function of her life is to reassure the Creature that he is not alone.

The destructive force that runs rampant in *Frankenstein* is not Victor's creation, but his ideological inheritance, an inheritance he passes on to his 'offspring'. Victor and the Creature share the same utilitarian, mechanistic logic that understands human life in terms of functionality. But this logic, while deploying the discourse of reason, masks an inner loneliness born of repressed emotion

The discourse of reason used by the Creature allows him to rationalise his yearnings and desires, and transform them into specific demands. But the passion that drives the Creature is only barely repressed and threatens to spill out as destructive rage. The Creature hopes the dyadic structure of male-to-female will redirect his emotional drives containing them within a self-sustaining loop of reciprocal sympathy. It is this logic that wins Victor over to the Creature's demand. However, the reason that Victor finally refuses the Creature's demand arises from his speculation that the body under construction might develop into a 'thinking and reasoning animal' with a will of her own. One of Victor's fears is that she might break free from the self-sustaining dyad proposed by the Creature and become a destructive force. All Victor's anxieties arise from his inability to control causality - from his inability to establish ratio, order, and self-sustaining balance. And yet, paradoxically, the rationale behind the Creature's original argument is that it would re-establish order and balance, that by a further act of creation Victor would be able to neutralise the potential for destruction latent within his first act. Mary Shelley's understanding of causality is a complex one. Actions when done cannot be so easily undone. Causality, when it comes to

human life, cannot be rationalised, for the consequences of an action, particularly in relation to human psychology, cannot be fully mapped.

Mary Shelley complicates the idea that reason functions as an objective standard. She forces us as readers to ask the question: where does reason reside? Does it dwell within as an innate principle that structures cognition? Or does it dwell without, as an organising principle that governs the natural order of things? Victor Frankenstein explodes the latter proposition by conceiving the natural order to be a dynamic structure, a generative process that holds the potential for transformation. The form of life that Victor produces challenges the idea of transcendent form: the idea that nature always unfolds itself in the same patterns. Victor applies his reason to nature and produces 'deformity'. He reveals humanity to be subject to unpredictable natural forces that exist within and without the human frame. In doing this he displaces 'Man' as the reasoning centre of the natural order. In this way the human subject loses his objective distance - the basis of his claim to superior reason - and is revealed as hopelessly caught up in the machinery of life.¹⁵⁵

The former proposition, that reason resides within the mind and structures cognition is complicated by Mary Shelley's presentation of the Creature's mode of reasoning. The Creature is not driven by reason to reach the conclusions that he reaches but by passion. He describes himself to Victor Frankenstein as: 'consumed by a burning passion which only you can gratify' (*Frankenstein* p.118). He uses his reasoning to direct his passions towards a fixed attainable objective, but he also uses his reasoning in order to structure his desires, and so

¹⁵⁵ For a discussion of some of these issues see: Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans John Cumming (London: Verso 1997); Genevieve Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: 'Male' and 'Female' in Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge 1993); Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge 1992)

make them communicable to another. His reasoning then functions as a vehicle for his passions but has no originary status. Mary Shelley's conception of reason has a strong resemblance to that of David Hume's. Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* challenges the age-old philosophical orthodoxy that passion and reason function as counter balances to one another, and debunks the established view that 'suppos'd [the] pre-eminence of reason above passion'.¹⁵⁶ Hume stresses the functionality of reasoning, demanding that it has no 'original influence' on our thought or actions. The passions on the other hand do have a powerful influence over our conduct, and so Hume concludes: 'Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.'¹⁵⁷ Perhaps Hume's most startling assertion, and one with particular relevance to *Frankenstein*, is the separation he makes between reason and morality. Again, the established orthodoxy tended to associate reason with virtue and 'excess' of passion with vice. Hume refused to accept the equation of reason with moral judgement:

Where a passion is neither founded on false suppositions, nor chuses means insufficient for the end, the understanding can neither justify nor condemn it. 'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an *Indian* or person wholly unknown to me.¹⁵⁸

If we examine Hume's statement in terms of the Creature's proposition then we discover that his demands are 'reasonable' in so far as they are not based upon false suppositions, and because the means exist in order to secure their achievement. In terms of morality, in a similar way to Hume's example of the man prepared to destroy the world to prevent the scratching of his finger, the

¹⁵⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1978) II, III, III, p.413.

¹⁵⁷ *A Treatise of Human Nature*, II, III, III, p. 415.

¹⁵⁸ *A Treatise of Human Nature*, II, III, III, p. 416.

Creature is prepared to unleash untold destruction unless his emotional pain is alleviated. He remarks to Victor that if his demands are not met: 'not only you and your family, but thousands of others, shall be swallowed up in the whirlwinds of ... rage' (*Frankenstein* p.78). The passion generated by the Creature's social alienation is powerful enough to override his fellow feeling, but it does not override his ability to reason. Indeed his threat to cause destruction is a product of his reasoning, as it is designed to encourage Victor to submit to his demand.

For the Creature reason is clearly the slave of his passions, but might not the same be said of Victor Frankenstein? If we re-evaluate Victor's time at Ingolstadt it becomes clear that his tireless labour is not motivated by reason. Victor clearly goes to his work with a passion. We know Victor's rationale for his labour, he sees himself as a scientific pioneer, on the brink of making a groundbreaking discovery that will secure his position as the benefactor of mankind. But given Mary Shelley's complex conception of reason we can assume that the passion that motivates Victor originated before the rationale that is used to justify it.

We know the most traumatic event to occur in Victor's life before he goes to university is the death of his mother. We also know that the Frankenstein family's cultural response to mourning is one that demands the repression of 'excessive' emotions. Victor's sense of loneliness and social alienation as he makes his way to Ingolstadt also indicates that he has not fully come to terms with the loss of his mother. Victor's scientific enquiries might then be motivated by

displaced passions arising from maternal loss.¹⁵⁹ From this we can conclude that Victor's 'use' of dismembered body parts is not simply an objective exercise in scientific enquiry. Victor's mental state, his being oblivious to changes in day and night, his description of himself as having lost all 'soul or sensation' suggests a period in human development before the emergence of the unified subject. The process by which human beings arrive at self-awareness is brilliantly described by Mary Shelley through the Creature's narrative of its early life. Victor, using a Lockean model, is regressing to an early stage of this process, a stage at which sensation and reflection have not occurred to a sufficient degree to produce self-awareness. In psychoanalytical terms Victor's activities might also have a narcissistic element to them. Victor's use of dismembered body parts is suggestive of the autoerotic period in infancy when a child becomes aware of the limits of its own physicality through its sensual engagement with its own body and the body of its mother. Thus in retreating into his laboratory Victor is regressing back to a time of relative safety, but in doing this he is not facing up to the reality of his loss. Victor is responding to his grief by *losing himself* in his work. Victor's employment of the rhetoric of the work ethic may well disguise the fact that he is engaged in a form of 'infantile' play. But whether Victor is engaging in work or play it is clear that, like Weber's Protestant worker, he is driven by a deep inner loneliness born of alienation.

Victor's creation is also motivated by passions arising from deep inner loneliness. The desolation that the Creature inflicts on Frankenstein's loved ones begins to take on the status of a calling, a sense of vocation, following Victor's

¹⁵⁹ Victor's unconscious desires for his mother are suggested by the dream he experiences after the Creature has been given life. Victor dreams he sees Elizabeth walking the streets of Ingolstadt. But on embracing her and 'attempting to imprint the first kiss on her lips' her features change and Victor imagines he is holding the corpse of his dead mother. (*Frankenstein* p.39)

refusal to provide him with a female companion. The Creature does not unleash destruction on all mankind as he originally threatened he would, he is systematic in his labours, murdering Victor's friends and relatives one at a time until Victor is finally alone. However, it would be wrong to assume the Creature gains a sense of satisfaction or fulfilment from his 'work'. We gain a psychological insight into the Creature's state of mind through his conversation with Walton. We learn from this that the Creature did not always take pleasure from inflicting pain on his victims. He remarks to Walton: 'Think ye that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears? My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy; and, when wrenched by misery to vice and hatred, it did not endure the violence of the change without torture' (*Frankenstein* p.188). We also learn that the emotional pain he inflicted on Victor produced no long-term satisfaction: 'For whilst I destroyed his hopes, I did not satisfy my own desires. They were forever ardent and craving ...' (*Frankenstein* p.189). Thus the object of his 'employment', to inflict psychological pain on his 'enemy', was not in any straightforward way the motivation for his actions, rather it was the vehicle for his passions: 'I was the slave, not the master of an impulse, which I detested, yet could not disobey' (*Frankenstein* p.189). The last remark might have been uttered by Victor at the height of his fervent labours at Ingolstadt, for he like the Creature blinds himself to the horrors of his occupation. As the novel progresses it becomes increasingly clear that Mary Shelley's interest is not simply in the form that a pursuit or vocation takes but what impulse or drive compels individuals forever onwards in their endeavours.

In stripping Victor of his friends and relatives the Creature also strips him of his social identity. In a telling episode Victor speculates, before the death of

Elizabeth on her wedding night, about what would become of him if he defeated the Creature and was left alone with his bride. Victor of course assumes that he will be the object upon which the Creature will vent his fury and not his wife-to-be. Victor imagines that by defeating the Creature he will achieve a sense of freedom. He compares this freedom to the ‘liberty’ experienced by a landless peasant:

If he were vanquished, I should be a free man. Alas! What freedom? such as the peasant enjoys when his family have been massacred before his eyes, his cottage burnt, his lands laid waste, and he turned adrift, homeless, penniless, and alone, but free. Such would be my liberty, except that in Elizabeth I possessed a treasure; alas! Balanced by those horrors of remorse and guilt, which would pursue me until death. (Frankenstein p.159)

The Creature grants Victor his ‘freedom’, but not before taking from him his last possession, Elizabeth. The freedom that Victor outlines is of course the freedom that the Creature experiences every day of his life. It is a living hell. Freedom in this instance is cultural disorientation. The sense of having no one who belongs to you or to whom you belong. The Creature reduces Victor to this state of being, even making his home town Geneva, the place that provided him with one of the most distinct cultural identities in eighteenth-century Europe, hateful to him: ‘my country, which, when I was happy and beloved, was dear to me, now, in my adversity, became hateful’ (*Frankenstein* p.171). Victor’s first resolution following the completion of the Creature’s carnage is to leave Geneva forever.

From this day forth Victor’s sole obsession in life is the pursuit of the Creature. By the closing pages of the novel the idea of pursuit in the sense of a vocation, a calling, as something to be laboured at, has been pared down by Mary Shelley. Now, pursuit is a futile activity: to be compelled onwards, to labour towards. The purpose of Victor’s life thus far has been to reach a fixed

destination, and to achieve attainable objectives. Now Victor's destination keeps moving, and even if he reached his destination and met the Creature in physical combat the Creature's physical prowess would ensure his destruction.

Through his labour of desolation the Creature has become the focal point of another's pursuit, becoming the object of Victor's hatred and so the sole obsession of his life. It is now Victor's life that is marked by suffering and physical hardship. Victor, unlike the restless activities of his student days now longs for rest, but he cannot rest from his labour for fear of falling behind, even though the object he pursues is compelled to movement precisely because he is pursuing it. Thus the passion that motivates Victor has become its own spur. But, we might ask, has the situation ever been any different? Victor's final pursuit with the aim of destroying his creation is, on an existential level, not so far removed from his original pursuit that aimed to bring it to life. In *Frankenstein* Mary Shelley reveals the spiritual emptiness that lies at the heart of the Protestant work ethic. She also shows how the work ethic tirelessly attempts to fill the emotional void it has helped to create.

Chasing the Horizon

Frankenstein concludes as it begins with the figure of the explorer Walton trapped in the ice facing possible destruction. Walton contemplates whether he should, provided he escapes from his present predicament, continue with his voyage and risk the possible destruction of himself and his crew, or return home and bear the stigma of having failed at his vocation.

In Walton Mary Shelley presents us with yet another middle class male who is entirely caught up in a single occupation that has come to define his purpose in life. Once again, the emotional drive that compels Walton ever onwards is the product of alienation and the experience of inner loneliness. Unlike Victor, we learn from Walton's letters to his sister that he did not have a close relationship with his father during his childhood, and was effectively allowed to run wild until the age of fourteen. Walton yearns for friendship. Notably the language he uses to express his need for companionship resembles that of the Creature, but for the fact that Walton seeks a male companion: 'I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy; and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil. I have no friend ... I desire the company of a man who could sympathise with me; whose eyes would reply to mine' (*Frankenstein* p.8). At first it might seem odd that Walton, who is surrounded by his male crew day and night, feels the want of male company, but Walton claims he will find no friend among 'merchants and seamen'. Walton clearly seeks a companion from a similar class to his own. He seeks a man who is older and wiser than him who can make up for his lack of education and support him in his endeavours. With the appearance of Victor Frankenstein on his vessel Walton believes he has found such a man.

Walton and Victor are both 'lettered male Europeans', men whom Mary Louise Pratt identifies as embarking on a project during the eighteenth century to systematically map the 'unknown' world and so reveal it to the 'sight' of European structures of knowing:

One by one the planet's life form were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order. The (lettered, male, European) eye that held the system could

familiarize (“naturalize”) new sites/sights immediately upon contact, by incorporating them into the language of the system.¹⁶⁰

The bond that emerges between Victor and Walton is founded on their shared mode of perception. As in the case of Pratt’s gentlemen explorers, Walton and Victor attempt to produce order by projecting onto nature a pre-existing schematic structure that organises the natural world. Notably, in the case of the Victor’s creation, his form is so ‘unsightly’ that it cannot be incorporated into this schematic structure. What this reveals is the limits of this mode of perception. The explorer scientist may be driven by an anxiety of the unknown to transform the world into familiar territory, but in doing this he places himself at risk of encountering ‘something’ that refuses to be incorporated into his field of vision. Moreover, the further his vision extends, the further away from ‘home’ he travels, and the more perilous his journey becomes. Thus we encounter Walton on the brink of possible destruction on the threshold of the ‘known’ world.

Walton may like to imagine himself as a man alone in the face of adversity, but he is not alone, he is surrounded by his crew. The only way that he is alone, at least until the arrival of Victor, is that he is unable to share with his crewmates the dream of discovery that is compelling him onwards. There is then a division of labour, between the mental labour of the ship’s captain and the physical labour of the crew. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer explore just such a division of labour in their analysis of book XII of Homer’s *Odyssey* in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

¹⁶⁰ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge 1992) p.31.

In Book XII of the *Odyssey* Odysseus binds himself to a mast in order that he might experience the song of the Sirens without surrendering to it and so securing his ruin. Odysseus insists that his crew fill their ears with wax so that they can continue their labour without being distracted by the Siren's song.

Adorno and Horkheimer comment of the oarsmen's labour: 'The laborers must be fresh and concentrate as they look ahead, and must ignore whatever lies to one side. They must doggedly sublimate in additional effort the drive that impels to destruction'.¹⁶¹ The oarsmen are pursuing Odysseus' desires, but in order to do this and not become distracted from their labour they must be oblivious to the nature of his desires. The same might be said in relation to Walton and his crew. Walton is alone, consumed by his desires and imaginings, but he cannot fulfil his desires without the labour of others who do not share his dreams. Moreover, like Odysseus, Walton must bind himself to his purpose in order to arrive at his final destination. Walton, in order to succeed must be disciplined, for to surrender to his impulse would result in his destruction, though this self-same impulse compels him to his calling.

In Adorno's and Horkheimer's view the image of Odysseus bound to the mast is symbolic of the bourgeois individual's attempt to sustain a coherent sense of self, and not succumb to the destructive impulses latent within civilisation: 'The strain of holding the I together adheres to the I in all stages; and the temptation to lose it has always been there with the blind determination to maintain it.'¹⁶² The strain of holding the I together is comparable to the kind of self-discipline required by Weber's 'ethic of ascetic Protestantism'. Walton clearly fits the stereotype of the Protestant worker. Before embarking on his

¹⁶¹ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans John Cumming (London: Verso 1997), p.34.

¹⁶² *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.33.

voyage he gains experience of the sea by accompanying whale-fishers on their expeditions. He describes himself as ‘voluntarily [enduring] cold famine, thirst and want’ and as ‘often [working] harder than the common sailors’

(*Frankenstein* p.7). At night he describes himself as retreating to his cabin to study ‘mathematics, theory of medicine, branches of physical science’

(*Frankenstein* p.7). We might assume from this that, like Victor, Walton’s sense of self is defined in relation to his vocation, and so in order to maintain a stable identity he has to remain committed to his calling. Once again, this conforms to Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s description of Odysseus: ‘[T]he hero to whom the temptation is offered has reached maturity through suffering. Throughout the many mortal perils he has had to endure, the unity of his own life, the identity of the individual, has been confirmed for him’.¹⁶³ In Walton’s case it is necessary to remind ourselves that he is not labouring alone, and that without others he could not accomplish his task. What the bourgeois individualist fails to acknowledge is the debt he owes to those who labour ‘for’ him. In the case of Walton this unconscious debt is revealed by his crew’s threat of mutiny. What the crew cannot realise is that to turn back does not just threaten Walton’s purpose but his entire sense of self. The threat of mutiny and rebellion inspires in Walton the same anxiety experienced by Victor Frankenstein when he becomes the Creature’s employee - it is the fear of the loss of intellectual independence. And yet, paradoxically, this independence is dependent on the ‘co-operation’ of others.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.32.

¹⁶⁴ Paul O’Flinn stresses how the presence of the crew places a check on Walton’s destructive ambitions. The Crew by threatening mutiny force Walton to turn back, but also force him to confront the fact that his voyage of discovery is dependent on the labour of others. O’Flinn contrasts Walton to Victor Frankenstein: ‘Scientific development subject to some form of democratic control – even in the violent form of mutiny – can avert the dangers its researchers

For Walton, as for Victor, the pilgrimage to the promised land, a place of supposed self-fulfilment, only enslaves the pilgrim to his purpose, forcing him into a mode of existence that is the very opposite of the existence he craves. Paradoxically, he binds himself in order that he might one day find salvation and be 'set free' from his vocation. Walton couches his desires in the language of scientific enquiry. He believes he is sailing into the future, and that by discovering new lands he is ushering humanity into a new age. In reality, however, his dreams take the shape of the mythical past. Walton is not driven to discover a new world but to return to a mythical Eden:

My day dreams become more fervent and vivid. I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight. There ... the sun is forever visible: its broad disk just skirting the horizon, and diffusing a perpetual splendour. There ... snow and frost are banished; and sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe. (*Frankenstein* p.5)

Adorno and Horkheimer describe the allurement of the Sirens as the possibility of 'losing oneself in the past'.¹⁶⁵ The past that allures us is 'mythic prehistory'.¹⁶⁶ Victor and Walton both unconsciously attempt to 'return' to an idealised past. Victor's labours at Ingolstadt involve a return to an imaginary realm before the emergence of the historical subject. Walton yearns to return to a mythical paradise, a place that holds out the potential of historical redemption as expressed in the hope of a new beginning. Thus in forging a path into the future, both men become further entangled in the ideology of the past. This

encounter and save human beings from the possibly fatal consequences of those researches. That is Walton's story. But scientific advances pursued for private motives and with no reining and directing social control or sense of social responsibility leads directly to catastrophe. That is Frankenstein's story'. Paul O'Flinn, 'Production and Reproduction: The Case of *Frankenstein*', *Frankenstein: Mary Shelley*, ed. Fred Botting (Hampshire: Palgrave 2002.) pp. 27-28.

¹⁶⁵ *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.32.

¹⁶⁶ *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.32.

ideology takes on the form of a secularised religion, with Victor attempting to construct a new Adam and Walton attempting to discover a new Eden.

Conclusion

At the end of *Frankenstein* Victor has been reduced to the status of a literal orphan having lost both his mother and his father and all those he held dear. He is also a cultural orphan, no longer able to feel at home in Geneva and forced to travel from place to place in pursuit of the 'son' he abandoned. In Mary Shelley's hands the idea of 'the man alone' as a model for the self is taken to its logical conclusion and exposed as a nightmare existence. In Chapter One we discussed Adorno's and Horkheimer's comment that 'Men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power'.¹⁶⁷ If the object that we attempt to gain power over is the self, then following Adorno's and Horkheimer's logic we become simultaneously disempowered from ourselves, or rather we produce the conditions for our disempowerment. Victor Frankenstein is certainly disempowered as a result of his narcissistic act of creation, but more generally the individual who claims to be in possession of himself is disempowered because of the social alienation that accompanies his empowerment. Throughout this thesis I have hoped to illustrate the limits of possessive individualism as the model for the self. In conclusion I will reengage with some of the key connecting ideas in the texts studied to try and present an alternative model of human agency. In doing this I will need to look again at some of the terms we have been using, particularly the ideas of 'culture' and 'the individual'. I have chosen to do this at the end of the thesis as our reading of

¹⁶⁷ Theodore W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans John Cumming (London: Verso 1997), p.9.

Rousseau, Wordsworth and Mary Shelley will contribute to rather than contradict this redefinition.

Rousseau, Wordsworth and Mary Shelley all conceive of self-formation in relation to models of growth. The growth in question is not just organic but related to the expansion of understanding. The mind expands passing through various developmental stages but never reaches a point of completion, as the acquisition of knowledge and the emergence of the self meet in the experience of consciousness, an experience that is ongoing. Thus the self is constantly emerging from and merging into a state of knowing. This state of knowing cannot be objectified, or strictly compartmentalised in order that it might be *made known* either to ourselves or to others. To this extent Wordsworth was right to be suspicious of models of the mind that attempt to compartmentalise mental faculties and stages of intellectual development, though Wordsworth's implied attack on Locke was unjustified as Locke's ontological perspective, as discussed in Chapter Five, was far more complex than Wordsworth's characterisation of it. Nevertheless, Locke, Rousseau, Wordsworth and Shelley present us with a developmental model of human subjectivity.

This dynamic model of the self seriously undermines the ideology of possessive individualism (even though the philosopher who provided us with this dynamic model, Locke, also helped produce the ideology it undermines). For if consciousness is ongoing then we cannot take possession of ourselves, because we cannot contain consciousness, and so transform it into a totalised projection of who we are. All we can do is reproduce self-formations that signify identity, but can never be completely identical. In this way we can appear to be the self-same person – and so we act in character, think in a certain way, display the same

eccentricities. But in reality we do not even have total control over this, for though we perform our character, we are not in full command of the performance, as the traits we display are the product of a process of development that is inextricably linked with our cultural conditioning. The term culture here is crucial, and I want to explore its meaning briefly, both as a social term but also in relation to individual human development.

Raymond Williams in *Keywords* and later in *Marxism and Literature* points out that the meaning of the word culture in the early fifteenth century, a meaning that persisted into the early nineteenth century, was primarily connected to the tending of natural growth, for example in relation to the cultivation of crops and animals.¹⁶⁸ By the end of the sixteenth century this meaning had extended to include tending to the growth of human faculties. Throughout this thesis I have used the term culture to refer to particular communities, at particular times in history, and the cultural forms that arise from these communities including their cultural identities. But Williams' earlier definition, a definition that would have been pertinent throughout our period, reveals an ironic discrepancy in my use. For example, Rousseau in *Émile* displays an anxiety that his pupil will be polluted by the intrusion of contaminants from an alien 'culture', to use the modern sense of the word; but to use the earlier definition of 'culture', Émile's education *is* a cultural experience, as it involves the cultivation of his faculties in order to ensure his natural growth. We might extend this to include Locke, Wordsworth and Shelley, all of whom like Rousseau are concerned with the development, indeed we might say cultivation, of the human mind. In the case of both Rousseau and Wordsworth a strong emphasis is placed

¹⁶⁸ For Williams discussion of the concept of 'culture' see Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977), pp.11-20; *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press 1983), pp. 87-93.

on ‘natural’ growth in childhood, in order that the child might not grow up to be overly dependent on or influenced by human others. We can relate this to the ideology of possessive individualism, which demands that in order to maintain his individuality an individual must be constantly vigilant of the boundaries separating him from other people. But of course in order to do this he must be aware of others. Even Émile, whose childhood is spent in relative isolation, eventually enters the social world, ostensibly as *his own man*. The adult Émile must be conscious of what divides him from his fellow men, and what principally divides him is the nature of his ‘cultivation’, thus his claim to individuality is based upon the uniqueness of his ‘cultural’ experience. But if we revert to the modern meaning of the word culture, and insist, as Mary Shelley does, that self-consciousness cannot fully develop without some form of cultural (social) awareness, then we might say that our positioning ourselves as individuated from society, involves the projection of psychological boundaries that are the product of our socialisation.

It is useful to turn again to Raymond Williams who reveals that the meaning of the word ‘individual’ is not historically fixed, and that its earlier usage contradicts its modern meaning: ‘[I]ndividual’ which had once meant indivisible, a member of a group, was developed to become not only a separate but an opposing term – ‘the individual’ and ‘society’’.¹⁶⁹ Williams identifies Locke’s *An Essay on Human Understanding* as contributing to the emergence of the modern sense of the term, and of course, as we have found, Locke’s *Essay* is a key text for understanding the emergence of the ideology of possessive individualism. Williams notes that the earlier meaning of ‘individual’ persisted

¹⁶⁹ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p.12. Also see *Keywords*, pp.161-165.

into the eighteenth century when ‘individual was rarely used without explicit relation to the group of which it was, so to say, the ultimate indivisible division’.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, according to Williams the transition in the word’s meaning occurred in the second half of the eighteenth century, a crucial period for understanding the emergence of the discourse of possessive individualism. The changing meaning of the terms ‘culture’ and ‘individual’, and particularly their establishment as opposites in modern usage is clearly relevant to the emergence of the idea of the autonomous individual as an entity distinct from society. But what I want to do in these closing pages is to imagine an alternative to the model of possessive individualism, a model that employs the terms ‘culture’ and ‘individual’ in a way that embraces the dialectic of their historical transitions in meaning. Following Williams, it is my contention that the various meanings of the term culture intersect in the person of the individual, who is, as Williams puts it, the ‘ultimate indivisible division’. Evidence for this can be found in the representations of ‘individual’ and ‘cultural’ development in *Émile*, *The Prelude* and *Frankenstein*.

The model of ‘natural growth’ shared by Rousseau, Wordsworth and Shelley, relates to the idea of culture as a ‘noun of process’ with all three writers dealing with the ‘culture of minds’.¹⁷¹ Rousseau attempts to facilitate Émile’s natural growth, and where necessary advocates subtle interventions in order to *tend* to a child’s ‘natural’ development. Wordsworth’s poem addresses the growth of the poet’s mind, acknowledging the mother’s significance in *tending* to the earliest stages of development, but placing a strong emphasis on individual growth both organically and in relation to ‘spiritual’ development. Shelley’s

¹⁷⁰ *Keywords*, p.163.

¹⁷¹ Williams, *Keywords*, p.87

description of the Creature's early life emphasises the growth of his mental faculties, a growth that whilst he is in the woods is independent of other human beings. All three writers also acknowledge that at some point a child will come into contact with human culture. This experience is not always a negative one, as all three writers express an attraction for simple rural life. Rousseau is attracted to a patriarchal rural culture. Wordsworth in *The Prelude* and elsewhere associates himself with the local culture of the English Lakes. Shelley's depiction of the Creature suggests her appreciation of the simple life of the De Laceys. Thus all three writers have a concept of what we might call 'traditional' culture, which Williams relates to the idea of a plurality of cultures arising from particular communities and localities.¹⁷² Notably this form of 'culture' is the product of localised social processes that involve an interaction between communities and their environment. These rural cultures can be related to the earlier meaning of culture, as involving an interaction between human beings and the land. In this way the landscape becomes a 'cultural space', because it has been shaped by human effort. Traditional culture, at least in theory, provides us with a happy compromise between 'the human' and 'the natural'. A form of culture that produces far more anxiety in our writers is the type of culture we associate with the 'growth' of civilisations. Williams relates this notion to the idea of universal history, an idea espoused by Enlightenment historians and philosophers, that identified a 'secular form of human development' that can be related to the concept of human progress.¹⁷³ We have discussed this at some length in relation to Rousseau in Chapters One and Two, but to emphasise the point, Rousseau saw the development of civilisation as producing a gulf between

¹⁷² *ibid*, p.89.

¹⁷³ *ibid*, p.89.

‘human culture’ and ‘human nature’. Wordsworth also creates a division between authentic traditional culture, as found in the Lakes, and inauthentic artificial culture, the by-product of civilisation, as found in cities. He expresses this throughout his writing, perhaps most clearly in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth articulates his distaste for the urban culture of London in Book Seven of *The Prelude*, though it should also be pointed out that Wordsworth also expresses admiration for London as an Imperial capital and an exporter of ‘civilised’ culture to the rest of the world, describing London as: ‘The fountain of my country’s destiny / And of the destiny of earth itself’ (*The Prelude*, VIII, 743-744). Mary Shelley’s suspicion of civilisation is suggested by the Creature’s revulsion when he learns about the inequalities that arise from the growth of civilisation, a knowledge that comes to him courtesy of Volney. The point about all three writers is that their work can be used to illustrate the emergence of a ‘cultural’ dialectic, in which various cultures, including the ‘culture of minds’, interact with one another. Now, particularly in the case of Rousseau and Wordsworth, some effort is made to keep these cultural spheres separate, in order to retain the idea of the individual as operating outside social formations. Nevertheless, their work can be read against the grain of their intentions to reveal the contradictions implicit in their positions. I want to return briefly to a moment in Mary Shelley’s novel, the moment when the Creature recalls hearing a musical instrument for the first time, to reveal how the individual is indeed the ‘space’ where cultures meet and develop. In doing this I hope to begin to develop a model of cultural agency, that provides us with an alternative to the model of possessive individualism.

The Creature's ability to appreciate the music he hears the De Lacey father playing is, using a Lockean model, the consequence of his previous period of 'natural' growth, in which his senses became refined. What he identifies on the most basic level is the materiality of sound, its basic tonality. But of course he does more than this, as the music being played makes a 'cultural' (social) impression on him, he recognises it as being different from the sounds he hears in nature: 'sweeter than the voice of the thrush or the nightingale' (*Frankenstein* p.85). What he comes to recognise as he listens to the De Lacey father play is that the music is being *made* – that it is a product of human culture. As readers the power of this scene is heightened by the fact that what the Creature perhaps unconsciously recognises in the music is something of himself. For the Creature is 'man-made', the man in question being Victor Frankenstein, whose original aspiration was to create an object of beauty, the scientific equivalent of a work of art. In a sense then the Creature is more than human precisely because he is man-made – his creation was not conceived in the mind of God but in the mind of a human being. The Creature was put together, made, shaped by human hands. But the Creature's status as a cultural artefact is not what makes him human. What makes him human is his capacity to make meaning out of 'cultural' situations. In other words what makes him human is his creative potential. The figure of the Creature reveals that in some way we are all each others' co-creators. We create and are created by 'others'. In this way we resemble both Victor and his 'creation'. But the Creature produces anxiety in us is because he forces us to confront our indeterminate status as both the producer and product of ourselves and the social world we inhabit *with others*: that we are both responsible and beholden.

Our potential as human beings is defined by our cultural/historical circumstances, but it cannot be reduced to our cultural/historical circumstances. The recognition of the humanity of others involves recognising that we share certain capacities and faculties in common. This of course was of major concern to philosophers of the Enlightenment. So, whilst recognising that an individual's consciousness reflects the historical situation he/she is in, what we might retrieve from Enlightenment thought, and those subsequently influenced by it, is that there is an aspect to human consciousness that is in some way universal, and it relates to our shared abilities. The difficulty arises with attempts to schematise what is common to all in an attempt to establish 'what is man'. But if we refuse this reductionist model, but still retain the idea of human potential as a means of recognising our shared humanity, then this allows us to imagine the possibility of social transformation, not through creating a false division between 'the individual' and 'society', but by engaging in cultural practice. In engaging in cultural practice we are necessarily participating in a collective activity, but we are also exercising agency that is particular to us as 'individuals'.

The 'individuals' discussed in this thesis have established their independence through their recognition of a cultural realm that is external to them: the space of others and the discourse that arises from this space. Even when conversing with other people they retain their independence because they perceive themselves as having *grown apart* from other people: of having undergone a period of development that is unique to them. In this way they establish what we might call the culture of the individual. But in order to do this they must deny their cultural inheritance: they must establish themselves as cultural orphans. They must believe that 'who they are' is somehow self-

begotten, that the child is indeed father to the man. What I hope to have established is that this declaration of independence, a declaration founded on the idea of autonomous development, is based upon a false premise. We are beholden to other people, not just other individuals, but to a wider cultural dialectic. Indeed recognising the debt we owe to a wider cultural sphere need not necessarily involve surrendering one's individuality, but might conceivably involve having our potential as individuals more fully realised.

One of my main aims in writing this thesis was to put into question the idea that an individual can be his/her own proprietor; but in doing this I do not want to present the individual as nothing more than his/her social conditioning. The ideology of possessive individualism, an ideology that persists to the present day, has not liberated 'individuals' but limited their potential. To free ourselves of this ideology is to recognise our status as participants in a wider social dialectic that facilitates our creativity and reveals our status as co-creators. In this way all human action is social practice in so far as it points to the existence of others. By recognising the contribution of 'these others' we can begin to question the perception we have of ourselves as alienated individuals. This type of questioning is an important step on the way to the emergence of a *sense* of solidarity – something akin to the feeling the Creature has in his earliest observations of the De Lacey family – that will allow for the development of cultural formations that realise our collective potential and so bring about political change.

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